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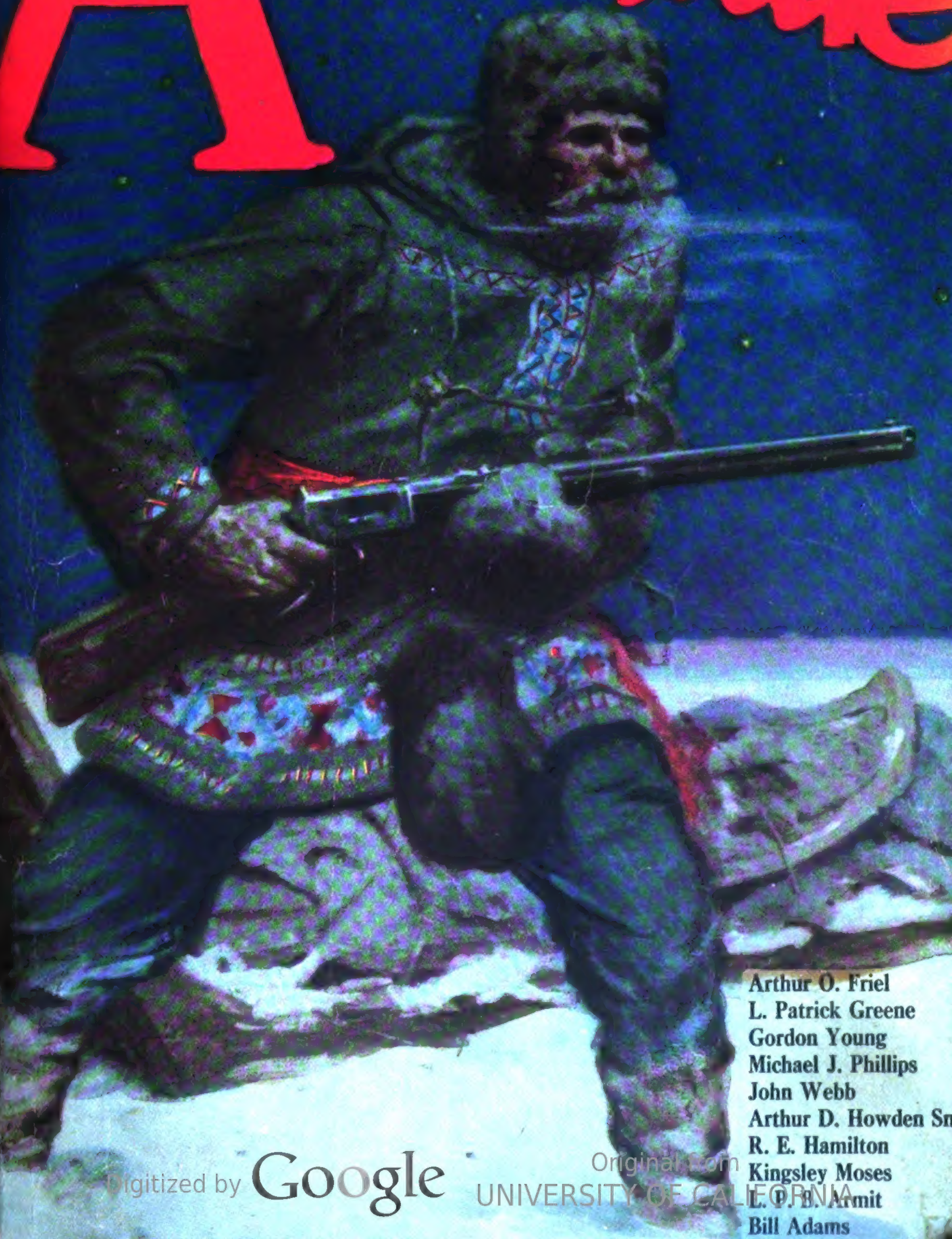
Adventure



Arthur O. Friel
L. Patrick Greene
Gordon Young
Michael J. Phillips
John Webb
Arthur D. Howden Sm
R. E. Hamilton
Kingsley Moses
L. P. B. Armit
Bill Adams

“Remember, take off your overshoes”

HOW we hated overshoes! In stormy, sloppy weather mother insisted that we wear them. But her final caution was always to remember to take them off. If we sat all day in school with them on, our feet would become “drawn” and damp and uncomfortable—unhealthy feet and colds would result.

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That is why we wear leather soles and heels. *Leather is a second skin to our feet.* Through the natural pores of the animal’s hide our feet actually *breathe*. Your doctor will tell you that this “breathing” of the feet is one reason why there is nothing like leather for health. He will tell you that a leather sole “gives” with every movement of your foot, yet it is so sturdy that it supports the arch.

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Ask for the all-leather shoe

Ask to see the all-leather shoe. It has all the style, the comfort, the economy of long wear and lasting good looks you are after. Insist upon shoes that let your feet breathe.

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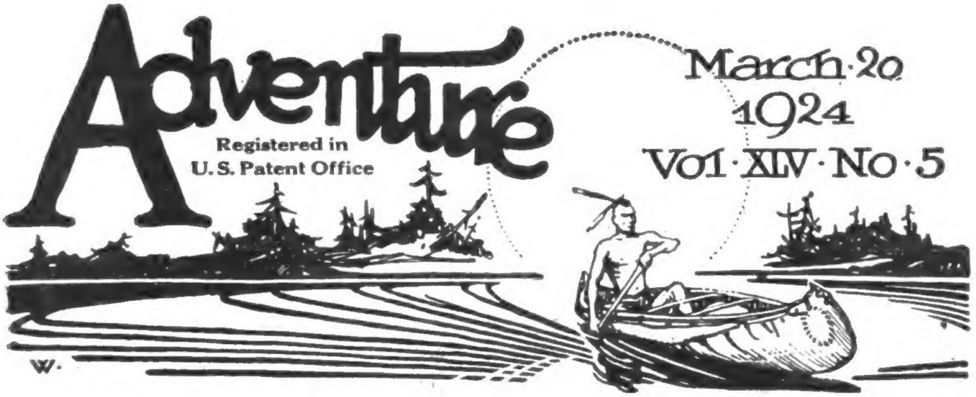

March 20
1924
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Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

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One Novel, Two Novelettes, Complete

THEY were only some doughboys, and they "knowed they done wrong." "SENS UNIQUE," a novelette of the American Expeditionary Force in France, by Leonard H. Nason, complete in the next issue.

CATTLE-RUSTLING, train-robbery and murder are the entertainment that Modoc County offers *Hashknife Hartley* and *Sleepy Stevens* when they come to pay a quiet visit to an old friend of the range. "THE MEDICINE-MAN," by W. C. Tuttle, is a complete novel of the West in our next issue.

A TREASURE for which men fought, killed and died, off Frankland Island in the South Seas. "LOOSE LOOT," a complete novelette by Frederick J. Jackson in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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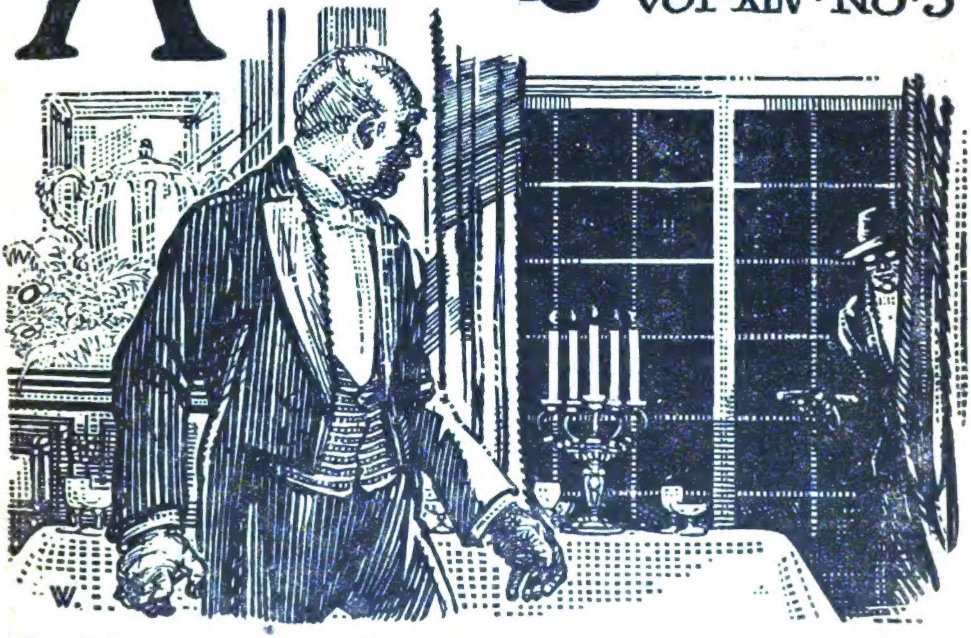

OINTMENT-POTS

A Complete Novelette by Gordon Young

Author of "Battling Butch Gets His," "Standish of the Star Y," etc.

TWO or three years ago there was a man in San Francisco who went by the name of James—McIntyre James. He ran a private gambling-club in a very respectable down-town building, and was said even then to dabble in dope and blackmail. Blackmail always seems to be a side line of the dope pedlers. But I did not know so much of that part of it while he was in San Francisco. But for the past twenty years and more there has not been much in the way of San Francisco gambling that I did not know about.

Though I came from a very conservative and rather wealthy family, I grew up in gambling-houses and made my living as a professional before I was of age.

What any expert can do with cards or with a gun I can do. I have acquired this dexterity by a lifetime of persistent, painstaking practise. I have worked as hard for my skill as a musician works for his; just as anybody must practise and work at anything if he wants to be the best in his profession.

The reason for this was that I determined to trim professional gamblers themselves; and they are all crooked. They have to be. No man can make a living at gambling by mere luck and judgment, for at some time he will lose both.

I had to be as expert with a gun as I was at cards because as a rule I played only with desperate men who took their losses with bad grace. The least sportsmanlike fellow

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in the world is perhaps the professional gambler. In the first place he is a cheat; and though seldom a coward is pretty likely to be treacherous, and anyhow shoots quick.

So far as I have been able to find out all gambling-houses are crooked. A few years ago there were some that depended entirely and honestly on the percentage in their favor; but I do not believe there is now a gambling-house in the country that is thoroughly square.

There is a reason for this. For one thing, crooked gambling-devices have become so ingenious that they are practically "safe." Another and perhaps more important thing is that throughout the United States gambling is illegal—except on the Stock Exchange. To operate a gambling-house one must pay somebody for "protection." I don't care how clever a man is, he can not run a gambling-house more than a few days without it becoming known to the authorities whose business it is to suppress him, and if he continues to run his house it is because somebody is getting paid. And a house that pays for "protection" will not find it worth while to depend merely on the percentage that is in its favor; so those who run gambling-houses invariably use some means of assisting their luck.

There is a very strong feeling among "scrupulous" crooks that if a victim breaks the law—as he does these days in gambling—it is perfectly proper to cheat him. For many years this theory was upheld by the New York courts, where if it could be shown that the plaintiff who was seeking to recover losses had himself incurred those losses in an illegal game, his case was forthwith thrown out of court. This was a judicial attitude that was very pleasing to swindlers.

McIntyre James' layout was typical of others, though he had finer furnishings than most and ran bigger games. He pretended, as the proprietors of such houses often do—and they are in every city, at least in every city I have been in—merely to furnish a place where good fellows could get together for a quiet game of any kind they wanted, and that he depended entirely on the rakeoff for his profits. That is, out of each pot, no matter at what game, he took a small percentage.

He went even further in his "fairness" than most proprietors and would turn over the roulette wheel or faro bank to any one that wanted to be the banker; in which case his housemen, under the guise of "guests," would trim the banker just as surely as and much more quickly than if the house was running the bank.

His roulette wheel was wired. Practically all fine roulette wheels are, at least to the control of black and white. Some of the cheaper houses depend on more clumsy and less expensive wheels, but, nevertheless, just as crooked though perhaps not as accurate.

I have been solemnly assured by people who never examined them that the wheels at Monte Carlo are "square." It is certainly greatly to the advantage of the Monte Carlo management that the world should think so; but I do not call any gambling game "square" where the percentage in favor of the house will inevitably destroy the player's funds if he stays with the game. It may possibly take a little longer to do that at Monte Carlo than in some other places I have been, but eventually the result will be the same at Monte Carlo as it would have been at McIntyre James', where the wheels were wired.

James' faro layout was crooked, though at that crooked faro is about the straightest game that a player can hope for in a well-managed gambling-house. The cleverest faro dealer can not regulate the turn-up every time or anything like every time in favor of the house, though he can greatly increase the percentage in the house's favor. And if a victim at James' took the faro bank he was pretty sure to have a "tell box" slipped into his hands to deal from.

I can't go very far into an explanation of these devices or I would be writing a text-book—as some day I may—on crook gambling instead of a story. It is sufficient to say that if sanded and marked, or clipped, cards are put into a faro box the gamblers who buck the bank can break it, and break it a whole lot more easily than a crooked faro dealer can break the players. Just as surely, however, though it takes a little more time, a dealer can break the players too with an "end squeeze," "top balance" or "spur tell" box. All of which may sound like jargon to some people who think themselves pretty familiar with faro; but if they are very familiar with faro, whether they know it or not, they have gone up against such boxes many times.

James' dice were "magnetic" or "electric;" that is, they were loaded with lead, cork crums and iron. I know, for I split them with a hatchet. They would spin, as dice loaded with quicksilver or anything else that makes them bottom-heavy never will.

And by the way, if anybody wants to find out if dice are crooked—at the same time running a good chance of getting his head broken—it is not when the game starts that he should examine them, but immediately after some suspected party has made a winning, because crooked dice are switched in and out of the game as the gambler needs them.

That is, unless they are magnetic dice. Magnetic dice are controlled by electric magnets under the green cloth of the table. With his foot or knee the crook presses a button which turns the electricity on and makes the magnets active until the dice have stopped. Then the electricity is turned off and the magnets are dead. Any one who craves excitment can usually get it by laying a pocket compass on a magnetized table, though it would be well first to reserve a cot at the Emergency Hospital.

In passing, I might mention too that many a fellow who ought to know better has been trimmed by the simple little game of "top and bottom." A number of dice, usually three, sometimes more, are put into a box, and bets are made as to what the sum will be when the figures on the top and those on the bottom of the dice are totaled after the throw. The "wise guy" may know that the top and bottom of a die always make seven, so three dice would total twenty-one, five would total thirty-five; but the chances are that if the "wise guy," thinking to play a sure thing, makes very much of a bet on that knowledge he will find that dice have been run in on which the position of the numbers have been changed. The spots will all be there, but they won't make sevens when tops and bottoms are added.

But I never played any game but poker. I have felt that I knew as much about that as any man could know. Strange as it may seem, crook gamblers, if no easy marks are at hand, play stiff games among themselves where each man is known to be a professional. A good poker player can cheat when you know that he is cheating, yet defy detection.

I never wear any kind of a holdout or reflector, nor use prepared cards. If necessary I "prepare" the cards while in the game. I can mark a deck in twenty minutes of playing with either fingernail or dye, and sometimes with both. The infinitesimal depression from the nail tells me what cards I am giving out as I deal, and the dye marks tell something of what cards the other fellow is holding, and particularly what cards he gets on the draw. No gambler expects to know what is going on in every hand; he merely assists his luck, controls the percentage, or follows the advice of crook device dealers who advertise, "Protect yourself."

Incredible as it may appear to those who think they know something of false shuffles, false cuts, stacking and markings, the truth is that ninety-nine and nine-tenths times out of a hundred they can't tell anything about it. There is perhaps no one with whom a crook would rather play than the fellow who feels that he knows all about cheating and feels that he is safe as long as he watches closely.

In my youth I knew Kleppinger of San Francisco, the man who invented the most successful holdout that was ever made. This holdout is invisible. It is a sleeve contrivance; but it does no good to look up the player's sleeve, for he wears a double, or false, cuff. I saw Kleppinger play with the sharpest of crook gamblers, men who knew that he was cheating, but they did not know how; and they never found out until one day in the midst of a game they suddenly pounced on him and searched him. One of them who did the searching was a friend from whom I learned various little clever tricks that have since been discarded as too clumsy.

Most poker crooks have a confederate in the game; but the best ones do not. These play a lone hand, and they practise as a musician or painter practises for skill. During the past twenty years the best of these crooks have used dyes, either an anilin pencil, too short to be seen, in the top vest pocket, or a little box of dye from which a trace of the color comes off at the pressure of a finger in the lower vest pocket; and this color is deftly transferred to the back of the card.

As practically all playing-cards are either red or blue of back, the crook gambler uses two pencils or two boxes. The pencil is never removed and never seen; but by rubbing the finger against the point enough of the color comes to the finger to mark the card. The marking is very inconspicuous.

It requires amazing skill to mark the cards and to read them, and they usually defy detection, even among crooks. There are comparatively few gamblers who can do this marking, for they must be sober men who practise faithfully; so as a usual thing the crook falls back on a holdout or on a confederate, or has decks prepared with markings with which he is familiar, and these decks are put into the game when there is a call for a new pack. And it requires much astuteness to detect the markings on these prepared cards. It is almost impossible for any one to do this while playing, and few can do it even when they have the cards at home under a magnifying-glass.

I HAD been hearing a good deal about the heavy losses men were having at James' rooms. He never played; and he had succeeded in making most people believe that he ran the games for a percentage; which in this case was the rake-off.

Everybody who knew me knew that I was a professional gambler, or had been until by a queer turn of luck a fortune was tossed to me. In settling the estate of one of my uncles, who, in forgetting deliberately to cut me from his will, had left an unwelcome heir whom the administrator insisted on acknowledging, I had been given some hundreds of acres of comparatively worthless bare land in southern California, where the richest oil fields of the State were soon discovered.

As I said, every one who knew me knew that I was a professional gambler, up to all the tricks known to gamblers. Nevertheless there were many well-to-do people, some of them rather prominent, who invited me into their games. These people had known me for a long time and felt entirely safe. They were more than safe, for I often had to throw away good hands rather than let there be the least suspicion that I had helped myself.

Besides, I never at any time was hard pressed for money. I lived simply and had no costly tastes. Friends, not money, have been what I cared about; and only such friends as liked me for what I was, not for what my money would buy. My friends who made me a member of their Saturday-night games and thought it real triumph to run me out of a pot were real poker players, fighting for each pot, not waiting for big hands; and I have seen everybody in at the showdown with two small pair taking the money.

One of these players was a banker known to me from childhood, who had known my grandfather, old Donald McDonald. This banker's name was Beldon. He sent for me one day and said:

"Don, something has got to be done about that fellow James. I believe in letting a boy have a good time. I did it as a young fellow, and it never hurt me. But my boy has been getting hit pretty hard at James' place."

His son's name was Wallace—Wallace Beldon.

"Last night Wallace dropped three thousand in one pot. One pot, mind you. He isn't complaining—why should he? He doesn't work for the money. He simply came to me this morning for some more. Said his luck would have to change, and all that sort of thing. But I find it's been pretty bad for him the last two months. I've made inquiries, and on the surface it looks like a square game. But I have doubts. What d' you think?"

I told him what I thought. I also told him to get a pack of the cards that were used at James'—to get a pack that was fresh and sealed.

The next day the cards were given to me, and I took them home and went to work.

I blocked off the backs of all the aces and all the kings into little squares about a quarter of an inch wide, and examined each square, comparing it with the same square on other cards. I knew where to concentrate my attention, for most cards are marked near the upper left-hand corner which means also that they are marked in the lower right-hand corner.

I soon found deviations in the designs on the backs of the cards, and I found that there was a method in these clever deviations. They were beautifully marked to disclose suit and value.

Even after I had become familiar with the markings it took me two days to get so that I knew those markings instantly, at a glance; then by looking at their backs I knew them just as well as if I looked at their pips.

James was using a very well-known make of honest cards. He was buying hundreds of packs and having some artist at that sort of work mark each card and reseal the pack, so that when they were put into the game they looked as fresh and honest as a new-coined dollar. Of course he had housemen playing in the games, and these men knew the markings.

A friend of mine, also an old gambler, visited James' rooms. It was not easy to get in, but he knew how. This man played a little, lost of course, and looked the games over. He had seen no one there who, he thought, would recognize me. They were mostly young fellows, hastily scattering their wild oats, and though they may have known me by name they would hardly know me by sight. My friend spotted the ones who he thought were James' housemen, but they were not San Francisco men.

It was then arranged that I would wear a broad-brimmed hat and represent myself as an Arizona cattleman who had just sold his ranch and was now in the city looking for a little amusement.

I was introduced to Mr. James, who appeared very glad to see me. He was a small, dapper fellow with a gracious manner and keen eyes; he wore large diamonds and had soft, fat hands. He was clean and neat, but there was something slimy about him—that kind of oozy slickness that all things have which slip about in dark places.

I was put into a game with four other men, and in about three hands I spotted the two housemen. One claimed to be an Englishman on his way to the Orient. The other represented himself as a motion-picture producer now in San Francisco to organize a company that would put San Francisco on the map in competition with Hollywood.

I was placed at the table between them. Any poker player knows what that means. They could whipsaw me at will. Supposing the man on my left had a pair of deuces, or less. He would bet, bluff, heavily. Perhaps another man or two stayed in the pot. Then when it came around to the confederate on my right he would raise the bet, though he had nothing that would beat ace high in his hand.

Perhaps I would have a good hand, say three of a kind. I would call the last bet. Then the gentleman on my left would not only call the raise that had been made, but raise again. Naturally the other players would begin to drop out, lose what they had already put in the pot rather than risk more. Then the precious scoundrel on my right would raise his confederate's bet. Three of a kind isn't such a good hand at times, so perhaps I would drop out. They could whipsaw me until I did drop out. There was no limit to the betting.

I let them work that and such other tricks as they had. I lost something like five thousand dollars, then quit, saying that I had no more money. They assured me that my checks would be good; but I told them that I always played for cash and expected to win cash, not checks; and that I would be back the next night with plenty of money. I promised them that I would bet more on one hand than I had lost altogether, which must have brought the slaver to their chops. The Englishman said that was what he called "a jolly good sport," and the motion-picture producer, who was rather fat and a bit puffy, said it could never be anything but a pikers' session if a game had a bet limit.

The following night I was there again. I not only had a big wad of bills, but several sheafs of most excellent stage money. Those crooks never expected to see so much pickings on one victim. Mr. James was wonderfully affable. He said he understood that we were out for blood, and would we like a private room?

I objected to the private room. I wanted as many spectators as possible. I knew that I could do my tricks with a hundred eyes watching, but I expected to have those fellows sweating pretty hard, and I figured it would add to their uneasiness if people gathered around to see the big playing.

Five of us were again at the table, and I was pleased when one of these dropped out after a few hands. The pace was a little too swift for him. Wallace Beldon stayed, but he played his own hands. He was of no assistance to me.

The crooks started whipsawing me again; but most of the time I knew as well as they did when their hands were of no value, and after I had lifted them out of their seats two or three times on two pair, or less, they began to sweat and stopped the whipsawing.

The Englishman excused himself for a minute. He came back with a holdout, a Kleppinger. There is only one way you can tell that a man may be using a Kleppinger, and that is by the way he holds his cards—all of them in one palm while he peeks at the pips.

After his return to the game the Englishman began squeezing his cards more tightly. I let him work until he had plucked the makings of a good hand, then I called for a new deck, red backs. That fellow did fidget and sweat trying to get rid of the useless cards up his sleeve. It was risky for him to try because quite a crowd had gathered round, watching closely; and moreover the cards up his sleeve were blue backs.

They knew that something was wrong, but those crooks could not guess what. It was just about as if we were playing with the cards dealt face up, only they were not aware that I too could read their markings. I cleaned up on every pot I went after, sometimes playing two pair for thousands, and at other times dropping threes and better into the discards. It had them baffled.

Presently the motion-picture producer also excused himself, and when he came back he began squeezing his cards pretty tightly up against his wrist to examine them. Practically everybody in the place had gathered around to watch the poker-playing; so those crooks, not being used to such a gallery, were pretty nervous. The betting was high, and I was winning, and we had it hot and heavy. I let them make a clean-up now and then to keep them eager and cause them to feel sure that sooner or later they would lay me by the heels.

We had been at it long enough, and the climax had to come. Then, it being my deal, I called for a new deck.

IN A new deck the suits are bunched; that is, all the cards of one suit are together. I counted the cards to make sure there were fifty-two. In counting the cards I had arranged to move an ace to the top of the deck; then just before I shuffled I lifted—palmed—the top five cards.

As every gambler knows, it is going pretty strong to steal two cards; it is desperate work to take three; and in a game where each man's fingers are sensitive to the feel of a deck, and can almost "sense" if three or four are gone, it is almost suicidal to take five. But I took five. For one thing it was my deal; and I had the feeling that they were about ready to set a trap for me, and I knew that for the next two or three hands they were going to be so busy stealing cards for themselves that they wouldn't miss the ones I had taken. Besides, each of them being a crook, neither could raise a holler for fear it was his confederate who had done the stealing. Young Beldon had dropped out.

I bluffed the pot and won it. I was keeping my palmed hand for an emergency.

The Englishman dealt, taking a long time to shuffle; but nothing much happened. Then the motion-picture producer got ready to deal. I turned my back on him to talk with some one standing behind me. I even went so far as to attract everybody's attention, and in this the Englishman helped me by an animated conversation. I was giving the motion-picture producer all the chance in the world to do what he pleased. He shuffled and shuffled, then began to deal.

When I picked up the three, four, five and six of clubs I knew that the deck had been fixed. There was strong betting before the draw. Every time there was a raise I raised back, and for a long time they came back.

I drew one card, the agreeable Englishman took two, the motion-picture producer stood pat and remarked jocularly that if a dealer can't give himself a good hand what was the use of dealing? I had caught the seven of clubs. And a straight flush is a powerful hand. It has tempted many a man to make a fool of himself even when he suspected that the game was crooked.

It was already a big pot. I counted it, and bet the size of the pot. The Englishman, who had drawn two cards, saw that bet and raised. The motion-picture man saw the raises and whipsawed. I came back strong with a raise of my own, as any man would with a straight flush.

The raising back and forth was enough to make a man dizzy. Mr. James, affable but a little excited, beamed. With the help of my counterfeit sheafs I tapped all the cash there was in the house; but still they would not call; though the motion-picture man threw away his pat hand, saying that he guessed his full house was no good. He knew he had given his confederate a better.

Naturally everybody around the table looking on thought that the Englishman, who had drawn two cards, now held four of a kind; and he expected me to think the same. When he ran out of cash he wanted to throw in his check-book, but I stood out for money. He had already showed his hand to Mr. James, and Mr. James had loaned him money; and now Mr. James loaned him diamonds. I accepted the diamonds at about the value a pawnbroker would have placed on them, then raised back. Mr. James went to his safe and brought more diamonds, the pledges of unlucky players.

I won't say how much was in that pot, for I probably wouldn't be believed if I did; but I know that it was one of the biggest ever played for in San Francisco, where stiff games were once common; and there was enough to have made two men rich when the showdown came.

"Just a minute," I said as the Englishman was about to spread his cards. "Let's have another deck of sealed cards brought. Mr. James, you get them—you can hold them. But you will probably want to frame and hang my hand on the wall, so we will need a new deck."

So we held up the showdown until Mr. James came with a new deck and tossed it, still sealed, on the table.

"Well," said the Englishman, pretty excited, "I made a two card draw and——"

He began laying down his hand a card at a time. He had drawn to the nine, ten and jack of hearts, and had caught the eight and queen.

The bystanders gasped and looked pityingly at me. Young Wallace Beldon almost fainted.

"I don't know that anybody would want to frame that hand of yours," I said: "but mine is a picture worthy of anybody's wall."

Instead of the little straight flush in clubs which they had kindly presented to me and which I had palmed into the discards when I saw that the big trap was being sprung, I now spread out a royal flush of diamonds. When I steal, I steal enough.

The Englishman cried—

"You——"

But he checked himself. He had meant to call me a crook.

The motion-picture producer almost had apoplexy, and looked dully from the royal flush to the deck which he himself had prepared.

Mr. James said—

"Here — here — something — something seems to be wrong!"

Understand, there was a big crowd around, mostly young fellows who had gathered at James' for a good time.

I stood up and said:

"Yes, there is something wrong. Everybody stay where you are for a minute, and I'll show you."

I opened the unsealed pack, then drew a gun. Dealing with one hand, I threw a card face down before the Englishman and said—

"What card is that?"

"I don't know!" he answered; but his voice lost its English accent.

I put the gun a little closer to his face and repeated the question. He looked up at me, then said—

"Ace of spades!"

I turned it over and it was the ace of spades.

I dealt the next one before the bogus motion-picture producer. He did not hesitate, but called the card as it lay, face down.

There was great excitment among those who looked on, for most of them had sustained poker losses.

Mr. James quite cleverly began to damn these two men as crooks who had got into his room, who had marked his cards and who had preyed on his "guests."

I had my doubts about his being really able to read the markings or I would have put him to the same test. But there was something in store of him, though he tried to get away. I marched him to a roulette wheel, overturned table and all, and sure enough there were wires in one of the legs. Some one did the same with the crap table and found that its legs were wired, and the dice when we split them were loaded.

I had young Beldon throw all the money and diamonds into a sack, a small sack that is; then the young fellows started in on those clubrooms, and when they had finished it looked as if a cyclone had passed that way. They mauled the crook poker players and found the holdouts up their sleeves, neatly covered by false cuffs.

Mr. James was frantic. He personally had lost a fortune in cold cash and gems, his costly outfit was destroyed and his chance of doing more business in San Francisco ruined.

"Who are you?" he snapped at me.

Young Beldon told him. Mr. James wilted and stared at me with angry reproachfulness, as much as to say that if I had only come to him quietly he would have fixed me up for life—probably as one of his housemen!

The next day James disappeared and was not heard of again in San Francisco. His staff of crooks also vanished.

Young Beldon estimated the losses as well as he could among his friends and quietly repaid a part of what some of those who could least afford it had lost; though when it began to be known what he was doing, it would have taken a million dollars to repay all the losses that were claimed. However, as we arranged it, there was a considerable sum left over which was presented in the name of Mr. McIntyre James to a Children's Hospital.

But such is the weakness of human nature for gambling that before two months had passed practically all of that same bunch of young fellows were gathering in another private club; and it was not long before losers were suggesting that I pay it a visit.

But I never did. Young Beldon had learned his lesson, and he was about the only one whom I was interested in.

All of which is by way of preliminary to my story, and does not have a great deal to do with the story itself, except as it introduces Mr. McIntyre James.

II

I HAD not been the only one of our numerous family to be enriched by oil, and many of the younger people, who were already well off, began receiving the income of millionaires; and some of them to spend it.

I rather regarded this luck as unlucky. What little education I have has been picked up piecemeal, and mostly from histories. From one of those histories I learned that the ancient Persians, whose name is now a byword for effeminate luxury and deceit, were once a noble and hardy people who, when they first swept in clouds of horsemen from the mountains upon Asia, wore suits of leather from toe to head, drank no wine, did not gamble and taught their youths but three things—to ride the horse, to hurl the javelin, and to speak the truth. Yet all those virtues perished from the Persians when they became rich; and they are remembered now because of their luxurious and degenerate vices.

History, like a mumbling hag by the fire, repeats itself over and over and tells the same story of families as of nations.

For once my tendency was to share the uneasiness of the more respectable members of our family who looked with perplexed anxiety at the follies of some of the young Richmonds and McDonalds; and there was special anxiety over young Donald McDonald Richmond aged nineteen, to whom the Standard Oil paid royalty on a dozen wells.

No one could do anything with him, least of all his widowed mother, who loved her supposedly handsome boy too much to let him make a fool of himself; and as a result, Donald was hard to manage. He was sullen unless having his own way, petulant, petted and spoiled; and in love with a woman. It was this woman who caused Mrs. Richmond, more in hysteria than firmness, to realize that something had to be done. The mother was desperate. Donald had said that if he was pestered any more about Bernice Waldrone, he would disappear until he was twenty-one, then marry her.

Mrs. Richmond wrote, wired, and at last telephoned me from New York, asking that I come.

I went, of course.

I like neither to be accompanied to a train for "good-by" nor to be met and welcomed. All my life I have gone my way alone. So I had let no one know on what train I would arrive.

Reaching New York in the evening, I went directly to the hotel where Mrs. Richmond and her son were living. It was one of those marble-and-plush hostelries with lights glittering overhead and potted palms stuck about like a stage set where the villain was to lurk, dagger in hand. The lobby was filled with an evening crowd of fat-jowled men, bulging of paunch, and lean, hungry-looking women in furs and silk. There were lots of these women in the lobby, and I eyed them as I would any other strange animals of predatory instincts, as I waited for the young lord of a clerk to discover that Mrs. Richmond had left word that if I came while she was out I was to be shown to her rooms.

I found there were six of these rooms, not counting the two baths; and I walked through them all, critically observing that a nineteen-year-old boy had his own sitting-room and private den as well as bedroom and marbled bath. In his bath I found sweet-scented bottles, jars of creams, pots of ointment. French powders for the skin, perfumed hair-oils, face-creams. And I thought of my grandfather, old Donald McDonald, after whom the boy was named, hard of bone, big of muscle, tireless, mountaineer and horseman, who stood by his friends with every dollar and drop of blood that he had—and I remembered the Persians who came out of their mountains on horseback, clad in leather, hurling the javelin and speaking the truth. This boy had in him the blood of the McDonalds and Richmonds—and ointment-pots in his bath.

In his den I looked about. Pipes—enormous meerschaums, one with a cluster of naked women carved about the bowl—long slim briers dotted with ivory inlay; cigaret-holders, long, of unclouded amber, monogrammed cigarets tipped with gold for his delicate lips. A Japanese cabinet, carved, ornamented, holding liquors and whisky, with all shapes and sizes of glassware; pictures on the wall, some of hunting scenes with slender horses and dogs, but some of women at their bath. Art. And nineteen years old. This was what the blood of old Donald McDonald had come to.

I sat down in a deep chair of padded red leather and fingered the row of books on a little table, with bronze elephants for bookends, the lowered heads of the elephants butting the books into position. There were such titles as "Love Lyrics" by Laurence Hope; a translation of Propertius; Baudelaire in French; "Stories of Court Beauties"; the "Decameron" in French, which is more wicked than in English.

I opened my valise and took out a copy of a book I had been rereading on the train, and I placed it on top of that truck. Before I was done with him it would probably interest young Donald very much.

As I sat there looking about a tapping came on the door.

"Come in," I said.

A tall, thin young man came in familiarly. He was not more than twenty-three or four, and dissipated. His hair was smooth and slick. He also used ointment-pots on his pasty skin. He had soft hands and an accent much like that which an actor uses to portray a fool.

"I beg your pardon," he said suavely with a good deal of doubt in his manner as he eyed me. "I was wanting to see Donald."

"Sit down. What did you want to see Donald about?"

He hesitated.

"I haven't time to sit down. I'll come again, or call up. Good day."

"He'll probably be back in a few minutes. Any word?"

"No; oh no. Just a message."

"I'll take it."

"No; oh no," he said; and smiled with a superior air, a hand unconsciously going to his pocket. "I am afraid you wouldn't do. It must be given to Donald personally."

"Sit down," I told him.

"Why—er——"

But he sat.

"Give me the letter!"

"Why—er—I can't—I——"

I held out my hand.

"Give me the letter!"

He spluttered a little and looked at me anxiously; then drew out the letter. If he had thought I would very nearly break his neck if he did not give it to me he would not have been far wrong.

As I took it he started to rise; but again sat down as I told him. I tore open the letter, watching him as I did so. Fright glanced into his features and did not soon go away. He had not thought that I would open another man's letter.

I read the letter slowly, then reread it.

Nineteen years old, and paying blackmail.

"Who-oo are—are you?" asked the fellow.

"What's this over? Why should Donald be paying this fellow Turner five thousand or—" I quoted from the letter—" 'or have the little transaction made public.' What sort of transaction?"

"I don't know really," said the fellow, smoothly lying.

I picked up the telephone.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded, losing a little of his smoothness.

"Call the police. Give them this letter—and you."

"It will ruin Donald!" he cried anxiously, but a little triumphantly.

"From the looks of things—" I glanced about the den—"he is pretty much of a wreck already. And *you* can talk to me, or to the police. I don't care which."

I was not bluffing.

The fellow stuttered and spluttered. He tried to point out that Donald would be ruined—that I ought to talk it over with Donald first; and who was I anyhow?

I took off the receiver. The hotel operator answered.

"Get me the police station——"

"Stop! Stop—I'll tell you!" the fellow cried, reaching out of his chair.

"Never mind," I told the telephone girl.

To him I said—

"You tell it all in the first sentence then—no hedging—out with it."

"The boy is mixed up with the dope traffic!"

"Oh, he is? Why?"

"Pick up a little easy money, I guess. That's what makes 'em all fall."

"Well, you guessed wrong. Try again."

I knew very well that more money was piling up on him than even such a young fool as he was could use.

"That's it. He's been handling dope."

"Does he use it?"

"They all do," said the fellow with cynical indifference.

"All who? '

"All the fast boys—an' girlies."

"You peddle it?"

"Me? No, no. I should say not. I don't touch it. Bad stuff. I've seen too many go to smash to use it myself."

"Who is this man Turner?" I inquired, tapping the signature on the letter.

"Oh, he's a doc that handles junkers."

"Junkers?"

"Sure. Fellows that have the yen."

"Are you quite sure," I asked, "that you are talking sense?"

"He doctors dopes. Guys that have got the habit."

"Then what?"

"Then what? What do you mean?" he asked.

"He blackmails them. Is that it? And having found out some way that young Donald has meddled with dope traffic, he now asks five thousand dollars every three months? Is that it?"

"You are doing the guessing. I don't know as much about it as you seem to."

"What is your name?"

"Edmunds—Eddie Edmunds."

"Well, Mr. Edmunds, you don't seem in a particularly agreeable mood. Just come with me."

"What the——?"

"Come on!"

He arose doubtfully, glanced toward the door; then with, "I'll be —— if I—" he reached for a gun.

He might as well have been mailing an order to the factory for a gun for all the good it did him because before his hand had more than brushed his coattail he was gazing into an automatic and perhaps wondering how it got so near his head.

I took him into the bathroom and searched him. All I removed from him was the gun and a little silver box full of white powder—cocain. Eddie Edmunds had the "yen" as he called it, and like all dopes, lied about it. He was a sniffler—sucked the stuff into his nose.

I locked him in the bathroom and left him, spluttering threats, but not loudly. I had told him that if he made a noise I would call the police.

I did not know how long it would take for the effect of his last "sniff" to wear off, but I meant to find out; and before he got more of his "snow" as the idiots call their powders, I intended that he should talk more fully and agreeably.

III

ABOUT nine o'clock Mrs. Richmond and young Donald came in.

She was a rather large, dark-eyed, motherly woman with a tired face and had not been sleeping well of nights nor resting easily of daytime. She sighed deeply after saying how glad she was to see me.

I suppose that I looked at Donald with prejudiced eyes, thinking of Persians, ointment-pots and a certain desolate hell-hole in California called Death Valley.

He was tall and not quite out of the awkward puppiness of youth, though he wore his evening clothes as naturally as if he had been a waiter. He greeted me eagerly enough, not suspecting that I was in New York on his account; but I could tell that something was very much on his mind after I mentioned that a gentleman by the name of Edmunds had called.

Donald had dark eyes and a weary face, sunken cheeks with rings under his eyes. He was smoking a cigaret about six inches long. His hair was combed straight back over his head and plastered down. He had run up to get another handful of those long cigarets, and was going right down to rejoin some friends. He said carelessly to his mother that he would be back when he got back; then left.

"Oh, they are going somewhere to have a little party," said Mrs. Richmond. "It makes him angry if I ask too much about his business, and I can't bear to have him in one of his cross moods."

She was an affectionate, helpless woman, who knew nothing of business, and all her life had been protected like a fragile doll; but I did feel sorry for her and understood the tears in her eyes when she assured me that the girl, Bernice Waldrone—private detectives had looked her up—was among other things a user of dope, traveled in bad company, was a decoy for a man named James Hackintyre who ran some kind of a sporting-club; and that there was reason to believe from Donald's nervousness and manner that she had started him to using narcotics.

The name Hackintyre, particularly in connection with a gambling-club, had too familiar a sound to be passed by unquestioned; but Mrs. Richmond could not tell me more than the detectives had told her.

A few weeks before Donald sullenly admitted that he had stopped going to Hackintyre; but he would not say why. He would not talk of Bernice Waldrone, and would grow angry and silent if his mother tried to question him.

She begged me to talk with him, awaken him to his sense of responsibility, and all that sort of thing; a man could talk to him better than a woman she said. Donald was a man now, and he did not like to have his affairs interfered with.

"I will undertake the management of Donald on condition that I can do as I like. You are to make over his income to a trust company, and they are not to pay him one cent without my order. And if I find you let him wheedle you out of money, I'll quit then and there. Moreover, I shall probably send him away to a place I have in mind, and you won't see him for a year or two."

"Not see my boy!" she cried, aghast. "Not let him have his money!"

"You won't see much of him after he's buried, and he will be in two or three years at the rate he is going. Understand, I am not arguing with you; I am not going to beg you. You don't do it or you do it. I am not particularly anxious to take him in hand."

"Never, oh never! I couldn't do that!"

After an hour or so of worrying and doubt, in which she repeated emphatically that she would not, could not, do a thing like that, she at last agreed.

"Now I shall probably spend the night in his room," I said, "and if you hear voices before he comes in, don't be alarmed. I have a friend of his locked up in the bathroom."

"Oh! What!"

Mrs. Richmond was greatly shocked and a little alarmed, for she was the type of woman that is disturbed by the unexpected and dreads whatever changes the routine of her life.

I have often noticed that the people who try to get me to help them are shocked because I do things in a way of which they do not approve; whereas if I fiddled about and moved as timidly and cautiously as they would like, I would be as helpless as they are.

IV

SOMETIME during the night, I don't recall just the hour, two or three o'clock, I laid aside the book I had been reading—not one of Donald's volumes, but "Death Valley in '49" by Lewis Manly, one of the epics of frontier history—and opened the bathroom door.

A nervous, wilted shape sat in crumpled dejection on a chair and stared at me with hot eyes. Edmund's fingers writhed; they plucked at his nose, at his arms; he seemed to have a sort of itch, and wriggled about. The eyes flickered and gleamed.

"For ——'s sake, let me out! Let me out of here!"

I toyed with the little box of cocain as one holds raw meat before a tiger. Again and again I saw his body contract as if he were about to leap at me and snatch it; but his muscles wilted before he could gather himself for the effort.

"Just a pinch," he begged. "Just a little, for ——'s sake. I'm sick. I don't use it, but I'm sick."

He whined like a murderer who has a dagger up his sleeve. With half a chance he would have had the New York papers wondering how it happened that I, notorious gambler and gunman, came to be found dead in the apartment of my nephew. Not much chance of me ever being found dead anywhere. I am too cautious.

"What'd you want? What you goin' to do? For ——'s sake, let me out! Just a little pinch—I've got to have it!"

He had got up and seemed to have pain in every part of his body. His dissipated face was haggard as a starved man's; and the thin, ugly mouth, bloodless now, looked like a scar.

"Who is this Turner?" I asked, tapping the blackmail letter.

"One of Hack's men. Give me a sniff, for——"

"Who is Hack?"

"Hackintyre. Jimmie Hackintyre. Runs the Palace Club. Give me—oh, for ——'s——"

"What does he look like?"

"Give me a pinch—just one. I'll tell you everything if you——"

"And I'll pour it down the sink if you don't. What is he like?"

"Little dark fellow. Runs the Palace—"

And he was off again, begging for his dope.

"Gambling-club?"

"Yes."

"And dope?"

"Yes. Give me a pinch. I'll—I'll kill you— I mean please give me——"

Inch by inch I pulled it out of him that Hackintyre ran an exclusive club for young swells; that there were sybaritic dope parties under his roof, where gay women and young men in starch and broadcloth lay about sniffing "coke"—he called it "Charley"—and that Hackintyre was hooked up with some of the biggest dope dealers in the country; and that the sons of some of the biggest people in town came regularly to the club; also some of the daughters.

I had rather thought that I knew a good deal about the wickedness and folly of the world, and of how crooks loaded up with dope to give them nerve for daring; but this rather gave me a shiver; those rich idlers using stimulants to give them a "kick" out of loafing.

"Know Bernice Waldrone?" I asked.

"No," he said, half-groaning.

I stepped back as if to close the door.

"Here—wait— Oh, give me— I'll tell you. Don't go!"

"Know Bernice Waldrone?" I repeated.

"Yes, yes. I know her. Give me——"

And he begged like a man on the desert for water.

Before I was done with him he had given up all he knew. He had denied that he knew Miss Waldrone because, he said, she was tired of having young Donald hanging to her skirts when she was having a good time with real people. Eddie Edmunds guessed that she did not want Donald to find out too much about her. That was his opinion of why he had been instructed not to let Donald know, if he should ask, that she was going to Hackintyre's every night or so.

According to Edmunds she was a beautiful blonde, fast, gay, and Mr. James Hackintyre was crazy over her; also that it was this precious beauty who had got young Donald to dabble in dope. Since then they had been bleeding the boy on threat of exposing him to the Federal authorities.

He told me that the following night Hackintyre was to give a big supper party in Berny Waldrone's honor, something special—big party.

"Hack," he said, "is crazy over that frail."

I was through with Mr. Eddie Edmunds; but I suggested that he sign a receipt for five thousand dollars. He spluttered and whined at this; but I still had his box of "snow," and the bathroom made an excellent prison. I explained that there was no reason why I could not keep him there for a week or a month, because if he made it necessary to call in the police they would probably be only too glad to put him in safe keeping for me.

He signed the receipt.

"Now," I said, "you can keep our little interview to yourself, or I'll prove to Hackintyre and Dr. Turner that *you* double-crossed them; and if I repeat parts of our conversation they will surely believe me. Get out. And if you care for my advice, you will get yourself full of dope—to give you the courage—then jump in the river. You are of no earthly use to anybody, least of all to yourself. Get out."

He went.

V

THERE are people who murder babies to get the life insurance—parents who do this. Insurance companies are aware of this, and are so fully aware of it that small children can not be heavily insured. Dope-pedlers and baby-murderers are of a type. If I eventually have any influence with the devil—and many people think that my life has been dedicated to his service—I shall try to persuade his satanic Majesty to stew dope-hucksters and child-murderers in the same kettle; and if he lets me handle the pitchfork that keeps them stirred up, I shall be about as well satisfied as if I have a harp.

Edmunds left, and I went back to my "Death Valley"—a story of rugged heroism and brave sacrifice.

In '49 two men, seeking to find help for a party containing women and children who had got lost in the heart of Death Valley, with practically no water and less food, and on foot, climbed hundreds of miles of mountainous desert, found their way out, loaded themselves with food and went back over that same terrible trail to bring out the party; then with incredible hardship and unfailing courage, for the third time those men crossed that region of sheer desolation—bringing the women and children with them. Rogers and Manly had not been related to any member of the party they so bravely succored; they expected neither reward nor fame; but they were Americans of the generation that builded the West and faced any danger, any hardship, without a trembling pulse. I know of nothing that for sheer stamina and heroism excels what they did, for they were sustained by no mere moment of hot bravery—theirs was a long-drawn-out agony. They were like the ancient Persians, clad in leather, hurling the javelin, telling the truth. Old Donald McDonald had been such a man; and the third of his generation was using ointment-pots on his hide.

I knew something in a comfortable way of the Mohave and Death Valley, where a man had to be a man or perish. Mere muscle would not carry him through; he had to have the nobility of blood and mind and spirit that makes real courage.

My interest in Death Valley had at this time been revived by an old miner—I had known him for years—who prospected in that desolate region. I had given him more money by way of outfitting than he would ever dig out of those barren hills. I knew that again in a few days he would be pushing out from Barstow, a little railroad station in the desert, and be gone for months in that land of mirages that lured the fools toward fantom water and the wise toward fantom gold.

I now wrote out a telegram, went down into the deserted lobby and gave my message to a clerk to be sent out at once.

Then I returned to young Donald's den and took up the book. Refingering it from page to page I read:

> Our road had been winding around among the buttes, which looked like the Indian baskets turned upside down on the great barren plains. What water we found was in small pools near the foot-hills at the edge of the valley, probably running down the ravines after some storm. There were dry lake-beds scattered around over the plain, but it did not seem as if there had ever been volume of water enough lately to force itself out so far into the plain as these lakes were. All the lakes appeared about the same, the bed white and glistening in the sun, which made it very hard for the eyes, and so that a man in passing over it made no visible track. It looked as if there must have been water there sometime, but we had not seen a drop, or a single cloud; every day was clear and sunny, and at night no stars forgot to shine.* * *
>
> Prospects now seemed to me so hopeless that I heartily wished I was not in duty bound to stand by the women and small children who could never reach a land of bread without assistance.* * * It was a dark line of thought, but I always felt better when I got around to the determination, as I always did, to stand by my friends, their wives and children, let come what might.* * *

Such men as Lewis Manly, as old McDonald, have been in the vanguard of the Saxon frontier, and when the spirit perishes that will stand by friends, their wives and children, let come what may, then Americans, too, as the Persians did, will start down the pages of history, bearing in dainty hands their ointment-pots and perfumes, to be remembered as a degenerate lot.

DONALD came in at about five o'clock.

I looked him over keenly, wondering if there was anything under that perfumed skin worth saving. His face was thin from night-long quests for excitement. He was now tired, but affected a graceful weariness and was quite cheerful.

"Up yet? For the love of Pete, you are some night bird yourself," he said, flopping into a chair and pulling out one of his cigarets, long as a new lead-pencil.

The men in our family are slim-bodied, but not thin-chested. His lungs must have been shaped something like pancakes. His ankles were in shimmering silk socks, like the legs of a half-dressed girl in a hosiery advertisement. He wore pearl cuff-links, pearl studs. His long hands were soft as dough.

He poked a finger against his jaw, blinked, frowned.

"Bad teeth. Got to make an appointment with a beastly dentist."

"A little hardtack and some jerked beef is good for the teeth."

He gave me a blank stare.

"What the—— is 'jerked beef'?"

I offered him Manly's "Death Valley."

He glanced through it rapidly, pausing a moment or two at the awkwardly drawn pictures of desolation, then threw it aside.

"Must be——, a place like that."

"Must be," I agreed, eying him and thinking of the old prospector, my friend—fifty-three years old, hard as an oak, with all his teeth in his jaws, hands like grappling-hooks, piercing eyes under shaggy brows.

"Well," said young Donald, stretching in a man-of-the-world boredom, "some little party tonight. Ran out of booze, so I came home. Little party of chorus maids. We wore their garters for coronets at supper. Funny? Say, you'd have died to see it!"

"No doubt. I've seen some things. Never anything like that. Miss Waldrone among those present?"

He jumped up, glaring, flung the cigaret to the rug and cried—

"Now don't *you* start that!"

"Start what?"

"In on me about her! And leave her out. Understand?"

"I merely asked if she was among those present."

"None of your——business."

People who know me well never swear at me. He would probably learn better.

"I merely asked a question," I told him.

"And I answered it," he said sulkily, stamping out the cigaret that had already burned a hole in the rug.

He did not care. There were plenty more rugs in the world, plenty more money in his pocket.

"But you did not answer very politely," I suggested.

"Not very polite— Say, are *you* trying to preach to me? You're a fine one to do any preaching, you are. Why, —— it, you are known everywhere as— Why, you're notorious."

"But I never wore a woman's garter on my brow. Was it Miss Waldrone's that you wore?"

"Say!"

He drew back a puny fist.

"You keep her name out of this. I'll—I'll— She's a respectable girl!"

"But you seem to think she'll marry a man who isn't—respectable."

"Are you trying to preach? Hire a pulpit. We'll all come."

"Before you draw your fist back at anybody again you'd better take a few months off, do a little mountain-climbing or desert hiking, eat a little jerked beef. Some other person might think you really had courage enough to hit him. Then where would you be?"

"Aw, shut up!"

He opened his cabinet and poured out a stiff drink of bootleg Scotch, drank it and glared at me. He was right; I did have a notorious name.

"And do you use a needle, or sniff it?" I asked interestedly.

"Do I— What do you mean? Say, what are you getting at?"

"If you don't know, why are you growing so red of face?"

With trembling hand he put down his glass and faced me.

"Now what the——"

He did not swear. I was looking at him with all my patience gone. When I am in earnest it shows in my eyes, and when I am in earnest better men than he would ever be keep their tempers.

"Sit down," I told him.

He sat down, but looked away, sulking like a child—or a spoiled man. Mrs. Richmond was one of those fond mothers who never believed in corporal punishment.

"It impairs the child's individuality," somebody had told her.

It also impairs a tree's individuality to prune it, to bind it up to a stake and make it grow straight—but it makes the tree bear better fruit.

"Look at me!"

He glanced sidelong, then faced about, but dropped his eyes.

"Sit up. Hold your head up. Look at me."

He twisted about, fidgeted, and finally got a position about like that of a consumptive trying to appear as well as anybody. If what I felt showed in my face he had reason to be uneasy, and now I was not wearing a gambler's mask.

"How many times a day do you dip into your little bundle of snow?"

He shook his head weakly.

"I don't use it."

"When did you quit?"

"I never tried it more than half a dozen times—not more than seven or eight altogether. When you're with a gang at a party and everybody's taking a sniff, you can't be a stick."

"You could go to different parties."

"Dead ones. Nothing like a little coke to put pep in a crowd. But I know its danger. I watch myself. It'll never get *me.*"

"No," I assured him. "I don't think it will."

He stiffened a little under what he mistook for praise.

"I've got will-power."

"Have you? Well, that's good. You could cut out the dope, booze and cigarets, just like that——"

I snapped my fingers.

"I sure could."

"But you don't want to?" I suggested.

"No sense in it. I watch myself."

He had sucked three or four inches of tobacco off one cigaret and was reaching for another.

"Now tell me about Bernice Waldrone."

He again started a flare of temper but, thinking better of it, sank back with—

"She'll all right."

"Travels fast, but like yourself, has will-power?" I suggested helpfully.

"She's all right, I tell you. Isn't that enough?"

"The report of your mother's detectives doesn't confirm that."

"Oh, they are a bunch of sap-heads. They don't know anything about her. I could tell you a lot of things—things that show how little they *do* know, but I won't."

"What for instance?" I inquired.

"To show that she is different than they all think. She is all right. I know lots about her. I know *all* about her. But I'm not talking. She's got a secret."

"A secret? Yes. She probably wouldn't want it known that she was a decoy for Hackintyre."

That lifted him clear out of his chair. He clenched those fragile fists and stood trembling, wanting to kill me.

"Who told you that?" he cried.

"It isn't true then?"

"No! No, a thousand nos! What do you know about Hackintyre, anyhow?"

"Oh, I knew a fellow by pretty much the same name in San Francisco. And I have noticed that whenever a man takes an alias he usually takes one that has a familiar sound. From McIntyre James to James Hackintyre is a very short step. You know Hack pretty well, don't you."

"No," he said sullenly.

"You've met him?"

"Yes."

"Gone up against some of his games?"

"Yes."

"Lost a little?"

"Yes."

"Bernice Waldrone took you? Introduced you? But she isn't a decoy?"

"No! And say, now look here! You leave her out. She's not that sort, I tell you. I *know*. Understand me? I *know!*"

"Does she use dope?"

No answer. He slumped sullenly for a time, and I nagged him with questions until he flared:

"Look here, and get this straight. She's a fine woman, but if she was all you think she is and a —— sight worse, I'd marry her tomorrow—if I could. And I am going to marry her some day!"

"You? I thought Hackintyre was going to marry her."

He was about as angry as a man could be, but restrained himself. He must have read in my face that I would readily give him one long and thorough thrashing to make up for the many he had missed.

"She wouldn't let Hack tie her shoestring!"

"But she goes to him every night."

"She does not!"

"And tomorrow night she will let him give her a gay little supper party—and be the guest of honor herself."

"She won't! She wouldn't."

"It's tonight—I forgot this was morning. And everything is arranged. The party is in her honor."

"That's a damnable black lie! You've been hiring some of those cheap detectives. I know Bernice. I know all about her."

"Tell me then."

"I won't!" he cried. "I won't tell anybody. I wouldn't tell you anything. I'm going to bed."

He arose and took up his bottle for another little nightcap.

"HOW much will you bet," I inquired, "that she isn't at Hackintyre's supper party tonight?"

He hesitated, then, impulsiveness getting the better of what sense he had, gulped down a glass of whisky and almost shouted—

"Anything you like—up to a million dollars!"

He was drunk with Scotch, anger and love-folly. I hesitated, thinking how best to strip him to his ointment-rubbed hide, and regarded him with disgust. He was my brother's son; and no matter what I may have been all my life, my brother was a gentleman; but this raw youth was an impudent fool.

"I thought you were a gambler!" he cried scornfully. "You're known all over the country as Don Everhard, the great gambler. A great man to bluff, you are. Well, I've called you. You've got a million, or close to it. So have I. Now come through. She'll not be at Hack's party. My oil-wells against yours, you big bluff!"

"Not if you tell her, no. She will be suddenly ill."

"I'll not tell her."

"In all the betting I have done, I have expected to be paid. You can't give over your property to me. You are a minor, and your mother wouldn't hear of it."

"She'll do whatever I want," he said impertinently.

"Except let you marry Miss Waldrone."

"She would do that too if——"

"If what?" I inquired.

"If—well, she would do it if I was ready—I mean if Bernice was quite ready. Are you going to take that bet, or aren't you?"

It was a rather large bet, and I am a sure-thing gambler. But if I won it would solve the difficulty of tying up his income. The chances were that his mother would balk about making it over to a trust company if he sulkily protested; but if he urged her to, that would solve the problem. Miss Waldrone might after all evade the supper, but that was a chance I needed to take.

"Yes, of course. I'll take it."

That gave him something of a shock. He hadn't expected that I would be such a dunce as to accept a fool bet, so he had felt all the thrill of bluffing—but had been called. That thrill of bluffing has ruined more men than bad luck at gambling.

He turned to take another drink, but I said:

"Now's a good time to practise a little of that will-power. You move along toward bed and take this book with you, look it over, read it."

"Why should I read a book like that?"

"Whether you win or lose, you are going out on the desert and stay there until you are twenty-one. I have wired a friend of mine to make all the arrangements."

He looked stupefied. He knew that I was not joking, but he had no way of knowing how I could be so intensely certain.

"Like —— I am! You must be crazy. Out on the desert!"

"Yes, with an old prospector and a half-dozen burros. Hard-tack and jerked beef—you'll have good teeth when you come back.

"Old Kunz isn't very sociable. About two words a day is as much as he talks. There will be no whisky, cigarets or dope. But you won't mind that. You have will-power. You may take a pipe—one of these meerschaums with nude women—if you wish; but they are pretty breakable. Women of the kind on these pipes don't stay with a man on the desert. You'd better get a bulldog brier. One that won't burn out easily."

"Say, you must be crazy. I'm not going out on any desert. Why should I?"

"Then you go behind bars, and probably stay there until you are more than twenty-one. And money won't get you out. I'll see to that!"

"Bars! Bars? What are you talking of?"

"Of a dope-dealer. You!"

He gazed at me for a moment, then put his hands to his head and slowly sank back and down into a chair.

"Oh, my God," he groaned. "You don't mean—you don't think that of me? You—How did you find that out? How did you find that out?"

"That," I informed him, "is none of your business. You are going out on the desert or to prison; and on the desert you are going to be a man, to fight it out like a man, or you'll turn up your belly like a sick dog and die. Then old Kunz will throw a couple shovels full of sand over you and go on. Do you go, or do I call in the narcotic officers?"

"Listen; listen, please. I am not a dope— I never sold— I—I was trying to—I did it for Bernice and——"

"You can tell that in court."

"You know I wouldn't bring her into it, not for anything. I'd go to prison first!"

If he felt that way about it perhaps there was a little something in him worth saving; though, true to form, he seemed bringing out the best in him to shield the worst sort of woman. I have seen the same sort of thing happen again and again.

"Well, tell me about it. How did you come to do it for her?"

"It's none of your—— business! I'll—I'll go wherever you say. I'll not bring her into it!"

"Then go to bed and get some sleep. We start tomorrow night. I'll see about the tickets."

He arose slowly and walked limply toward the door.

"And don't forget," I reminded him, "that our bet holds. And here——"

He looked around. I held toward him the book, "Death Valley in '49." He took it, fumbled for a moment at the pages and, holding it dejectedly in his hand, went out, dazed, sickened.

VI

THE following night about eleven o'clock I stood in the dark of a balcony and cautiously peered through the filmy curtains of the French doors at a butler who walked about in the dining-room, moving a knife or a spoon an half-inch one way or another, touching a place card now and then, critically adjusting a flower that seemed a hair's breadth out of place in some one of the many bouquets.

He was a rather fat though somewhat solemn man, and no doubt a judge of good cigars and port. I wondered if he had a weak heart, for I did not wish him any harm; yet I meant to have a look at those place cards and see for myself if Bernice Waldrone, whom I did not have the misfortune to know personally, was to be among the guests.

I say misfortune, because Donald had that day talked with me more fully about her, and she seemed the sort of woman that could turn even a sober head. And he defended her, though I tried to show him that every bit of evidence pointed to the fact that she had got him to dabble with dope for no other purpose than to lay him open to blackmail; and though she did not personally do the blackmailing, I assured him that she undoubtedly got her share out of it.

He would not believe me. He believed her because she had said that she wanted him to help her get evidence as to who sold dope. A likely story, indeed, when she could have bought all of it she wanted for herself, and from Hackintyre.

Donald insisted that she did not know Hackintyre, never went to his place, never would go there. In short, that she was a fine, sweet, noble girl.

So I had come to see if she would be here.

One of the silver candelabra was on the buffet, and the butler appeared to have found a tarnishing speck near its base. He bent forward, rubbing with the end of a napkin. He was across the room, his back toward me.

I wore a small, black, silken mask and carried a large automatic. I cautiously turned the knob. This knob was good hardware; it did not scratch, and clicked softly. I gently pushed at the door. It opened with velvety smoothness. I entered on noiseless tiptoes and pushed the door nearly closed behind me. I waited.

In a moment the butler glanced over his shoulder.

He wheeled about with startled jerk of body, mouth open, hands half-lifted. The napkin fell at his feet. His eyes stared as if he thought I was a ghost; or possibly he would have been relieved if he could have felt that I was a ghost.

"Good evening," I said.

"Goo-oo," he gurgled vaguely; then in a half-strangled voice—

"Wha—what—do you wa—ant?"

I suggested that he draw his own conclusion.

He was startled, not badly scared. He appeared intelligent.

I stepped to the table. He spoke anxiously:

"You mustn't take ho—hour silver, sir. It will spoil the supper!"

"Will it? I have seen people eat with their fingers."

He gazed at me doubtfully.

"I suppose that if I left my address, after the supper you would do it up in a nice little bundle and bring it to me?"

The butler gave me a sickly smile and shook his head.

I glanced at a place card, frowned, stared, looked at him and back at the card—

MISS TWALNO

I moved to the next one—

MR. FEJIRESEF

This was nightmarish. I glanced inquiringly at him, but he was soberly engaged in keeping his hands up, with an absorbed gaze on the muzzle of my gun.

I stepped to the next card, peered at it—

Miss Deonlwa

It began to look as if I had lost a million dollars.

Then—

Mr. Dnsarneso

"Greeks or Fiji Islanders?" I asked.

"What, sir?"

"Your guests, what sort of people?"

"Oh, very good people, sir."

"Yes?"

"Mr. 'Ackintyre is very particular, sir."

"No doubt. 'Ackintyre isn't so bad, though rather odd. You can at least pronounce it. But D-n-zar-neszo—how do you say that?"

"It isn't to be pronounced sir. It's a hanagram, sir."

" 'Hanagram?' What nationality is that, Hanagram?"

"It's just a hanagram—hanagram, y' know sir."

"Oh," I said vaguely.

"Yes, sir," he replied hopefully.

"But you are English."

"Yes, sir."

"And these are anagrams?"

"Yes, sir."

He appeared almost grateful.

At the time I dimly recalled that anagram is some sort of word puzzle. I have since discovered that it means to change about the letters in a name; leave none out, add none, but muddle them.

"Very interesting," I said, but with no enthusiasm.

I never cared for puzzles and such things.

"But what is the good of this clever idea?"

"Oh, Mr. 'Ackintyre thought as 'ow it would be good fun for the guests to be to some trouble in reading their own names."

"I see. Clever man, Hackintyre, isn't he?"

"Oh, very, sir!"

"I hear he gambles a little."

"It helped to pass the evening pleasantly, sir."

"And to pay expenses too, I suppose."

"Oh, hour losses are quite stiffish at times, sir."

I made a doubtful sound, then suggested that there was always blackmail and the dope trade to help with expenses.

He looked reproachful. Plainly I was a fellow with bad manners—no gentleman, as I may have superficially appeared, being in evening clothes.

"Well, now," I asked, "would you mind just walking around the table and reading off these hanagrams to me? I am curious. They interest me."

"Oh, I—really, don't y'know, I can't make anything out of them myself."

I couldn't blame him for that. There must have been fifteen or twenty places, and such perplexities as

Miss Ealacl

Mr. Erfmena

None of those was enlightening to me, and at the time I was not quite positive as to just what an anagram was.

"When is supper served?"

"I am expecting Mr. 'Ackintyre and his guests any minute now. They are coming from the theater, sir."

"And"—I picked up a heavy knife, weighing it with as professional an air as I could assume—"if I took your silver it would spoil the supper?"

"It would, sir!" he said anxiously.

"And this is a very important supper? Means much to Hackintyre?"

"Really, sir, I have never seen him more particular; and 'e is a very particular man, is Mr. 'Ackintyre."

"And one thief shouldn't spoil the sport of another, should he?"

"Oh, sir, really sir!"

"Tell me who some of the guests are. Their names?"

"I am only the butler, sir!"

"Don't know them, any of them? Don't know their names?"

"No, sir."

"And the minute I step back on the balcony, even if I don't spoil your supper, you will call the police?"

"No, sir! We don't want the— I mean I wouldn't do that, sir—not if you were so considerate, sir."

"No, I don't believe that you would care to call the police. Pretty meddlesome people, the police. Aren't they?"

Quite gravely he agreed that they were.

"But I have a cautious nature," I told him. "And I must make sure that you give me plenty of time to get away."

"I assure you, sir—" he began.

But I stopped him with a gesture.

"I don't want to be assured. I merely want to be sure. So come with me."

His face took on an expression of anxious perplexity as I beckoned with a forefinger.

"I am not going to hurt you, tie you up or lock you up. But come with me."

He came toward me with stiff reluctance.

"Is there any one in the next room?" I asked, indicating the double doorway, now closed.

"No, sir; no one."

"And the stairs, where are they?"

"Off the 'all."

"For a bachelor, Hackintyre requires large quarters," I said with an edge of sarcasm; but the butler was clever enough to pretend to be dull enough not to feel the edge.

I rather liked that butler.

He replied simply—

"Mr. Hackintyre entertains a great deal."

"Many pretty women, late at night," I suggested.

"Very charming ladies," he said gravely.

I had learned that Hackintyre did things on an extravagant scale; and from what I had seen in the dining-room this appeared to be true. But I am a poor judge of good taste, or bad taste, in furnishings. I was taught thrift in my youth and never had a taste for costly things.

THE dining-room was large. The room was lighted by a forest of tall candles, standing in candlesticks that appeared to be, and perhaps were, silver. The table looked more as if laid for a banquet than for a supper. The cloth was white as snow, crisp as frost, and the silver and glassware had been laid with an almost geometrical regularity.

A large rug that I did know enough to know was Chinese was on the floor, and to step on it was like stepping on a mat of down. The blue of the rug was, as I believe interior decorators say, "carried out" in the wall decorations. But to my critical eyes it appeared a barn-like room, rather bare, and no hiding-place within its four walls.

So I had the butler open the wide doorway, and we stepped into the next room—"up-stairs drawing-room," it was called; but why, I could not imagine. To step on the carpet within this room was like stepping on the magic carpet of *Aladdin*, *Sinbad* or whoever it was in the Arabian tale; and by stepping on it one was instantly transported to Arabia. It looked like the camping-ground of a lot of sheiks who had just looted a rich caravan. There were silken canopies and open tents, rugs, cushions, water-pipes, palms—a lot of costly, barbaric junk; but I liked this room much better than the other, and glanced about with critical observation.

"Anybody in here?" I asked sharply, for a dozen of people might easily have been there, out of sight.

The butler assured me that no one was in this room.

I knew that Hackintyre's was a three-story house and that the down-stairs had been turned into a gambling-hall, or hell, as you prefer. But a very gilded, ornate hell, as needs must be to catch the living. Another sort does for the dead.

"Let's get to the hallway, to the stairs," I told him.

His arms by this time had sagged lower and lower from the weight of holding them upright; but at my suggestion he put them high over his head with all the alertness of a man doing setting-up exercises. I didn't greatly care whether he had his hands up or down; but since it is the fashion among those who go masked behind guns to keep people reaching upward I thought it just as well to maintain my rôle.

As I opened the door and marched him out to the second-floor hall I heard a cheerful babble of high voices from below. Hackintyre and his guests were arriving.

Then, looking up, I saw on the stairs a woman in what I suppose was Bedouin costume; anyway she had a queer contraption on her head, a varicolored dress covered with sequins. She was dark-eyed and frightened, and after a startled squeak she turned and ran up the stairs.

"Catch her!" I said to the butler. "Up the stairs with you!"

He understood what I meant, and ran for the stairs and up them. The woman was no sooner out of sight than she began to scream in plain enough English—

"Help—help—robbers—help!"

That was a little more commotion than I cared about; but nevertheless if I had let my plans be ruined every time some woman yelled, I would have put in a great deal more time than I have in running away.

I stepped back into the Arabian room, closed the door, then went for the dining-room as fast as I could. I flung wide the

French doors that opened on the balcony, threw my hat on the balcony and reentered the sheik's camp, and darted into one of the tents and sat down on a couch before which a silken curtain fell.

The light in that small silken compartment of the tent was dim, but I saw enough in a moment, as soon as my eyes were accustomed to the change, to understand why the couch was there, and curtained. A stand with an opium layout was by the couch.

Almost before I was settled people were running up the stairs. I could hear voices, sharp with excitement. The door opened from the hallway. I could now hear the butler's voice explaining amid the staccato chattering. People hurried by, toward the dining-room. There was no fright, no indignation, but much excitement and great interest. I could hear the rustle and swish of dresses, the quick, high laughter of women, and the tent-like thing I was in trembled from being brushed against.

The open doors on the balcony and my hat lying there, seemed conclusively to prove that I had fled; and the ladder leaning against the balcony showed how I had come.

I removed my mask and put the gun away so that in case a search was started I might the better take the risk of stepping out and appear to join in looking for myself. Among so many people, and them excited, I perhaps could have passed for a few minutes without being regarded with suspicion, since if I appeared to be a stranger among them, each would have thought that I was the friend of some one who had brought me.

However, there was no search of any kind; and now that they thought me gone, they gathered in the Arabian room, chattering. Some of the women said:

"Oh if he had only stayed—how interesting!"

"Wouldn't it have been fun!"

"You know, I've always so wanted to meet a gentleman burglar!"

But I sat quietly, feeling no inducement whatever to come out and be petted.

The men too were quite good-natured about it; wondered who the fellow could have been; seemed rather well taken with the butler's story of how I had declined to spoil the supper by carrying off the silver.

They were, I judged by voices and nervous restlessness, nearly all young fellows, perhaps some of them prematurely fat, of the spender class; and complimented me with:

"What a sporting thing to do!"

"Bet he's an awfully good chap himself."

"Some poor —— that's hit the bumps himself, I'd say."

"Been in many a good party. Didn't want to spoil this one."

All of which goes to show how people talk of what they know nothing; and none of which softened my feeling in the least toward those gay young idiots who wasted their fathers' money and their own lives in the pernicious follies that Hackintyre provided for them.

I suppose that I could have hired detectives to find out what I wanted to know, though young Donald would hardly have been convinced by what they reported; and anyhow I have never placed much dependence on anybody other than myself when I wanted something done. I had gone so far as to have the agency which Mrs. Richmond had already employed give me some details of Hackintyre's house and draw plans of its various floors.

It was easily arranged to have a ladder left at the curb, and when I got on the balcony I had thought I could find out all I wanted to know by inspecting the place cards; at least more than I could have learned by remaining on the balcony and peering in at the women whom I did not know.

So there I was, in the silken compartment of an open tent, and many had stopped by the tent, some even entered it, picking up cigarets from a low stand, dropping on cushions, touching, brushing, keeping astir the flimsy curtain of silk that concealed me.

I am not a fatalist; but when I have done what seems best, I simply keep quiet and wait until the situation changes enough to require another move; and I had stood up, the better to be ready.

I thought that the time had come when I turned my head quickly and saw the curtains shake as if some one had peeked behind and withdrawn. I waited. A woman's small, jeweled hand was holding the curtain as if about to fling it back. But the hand dropped away.

They were now being served with cocktails, and as the butler passed, they were still asking him questions about me; and within the tent itself, not more than three or four feet from me, I heard a woman's voice rather silence those about her by asking just how tall was I? And if I was pretty thin? And if I was young, or middle-aged, or what?

"Why," said another woman's voice to her, "one would almost think you had an idea who he was."

"No; oh, no. But I am curious."

"We all are," said some one, laughing.

The chatter began again; then the woman who had been curious quite touched my gratitude by saying:

"Let's go over there where Hack seems to be telling a funny story."

And they left the vicinity of my tent, so that the curtain ceased to tremble, and I again sat down on the couch to await whatever might happen. Their voices continued in a staccato babbling, but their talk was inanely vivacious, and not worth the trouble that it took to listen.

Presently they went trouping into the dining-room. The doors closed on a merry hubbub, caused no doubt by the anagrams; and I had the sheik's village to myself.

So I lay down and waited.

VII

TWO men came into the room. They stopped near where I was, perhaps sat on the cushions close by. I did not try to get a glimpse of them. The least movement might have disturbed the curtain, and they might have noticed. I heard the scrape of matches as they lighted cigarets.

"Well, everything seems to be coming Hack's way."

"I'll say so. But he's making a fool of himself over that girl."

"Don't worry. He's having a little fun. Business is good. He can afford to act the fool a while. But don't worry. He keeps a cool head."

Both men laughed a little.

From time to time, too, there was laughter in the dining-room, a little high, but no different from that among many a merry party at a late table.

It was toward the men that I bent my ear. They left off talking about the girl, but their talk was sufficiently entertaining to hold my attention.

"That last assignment of walnuts is coming back all right. Got a cable from Santa Cruz that it had been refused."

Both men laughed quietly; and from the jerky remarks that followed, I discovered that one of their schemes for getting in dope was to have a shipment from this country "refused" by the firm in another country to whom it was sent. The shipment was then readily permitted to reenter the United States, passing by unsuspecting customs officers, though in the "refusal" there had somehow been the substitution of dope—as in this case English walnuts filled with dope were being brought back.

"Almost as good as the Swiss music-boxes."

"How those things did fool the customs!"

"The hollow cylinder of a music-box holds a lot of the stuff—and still plays a tune."

"Yes, but Cuban sugar is good too. A little white sack of the real thing in a shipment of sugar—hasn't been caught yet. Pretty nifty, eh?"

"Sure is. That was *my* idea."

"Great head!"

"I'll say so!"

Again laughter, quiet, pleased, self-satisfied.

"We're on Easy Street now. Hack's got it fixed so that if they do catch him they'll be awfully glad to let him go—providing he won't talk."

"I should say so. He's got the wife of a U. S. Senator buying dope regularly, the daughter of another, the son of a down-East governor—the sons of half a dozen men, any one of whom could quash a case against us. He's got handwriting and I. O. U.'s enough to wreck all the courts. We could pile up more 'protection' than the narcotic squad could break through in a bunch of centuries."

"Dope and gambling is the thing that gets 'em all these days. We're making money faster than a mint, and it's safe. Nobody can touch us, and the officers know it. That's the joke. They know we can tear this town wide open if we're ever pulled into court. The only close shave we've had was when that young Ferbert nearly got the job as Hack's private secretary. That would have put the skids under us!"

"And didn't we fix him!"

"I'll say we did. Planted marked bills on him, stowed a cache in his room, drugged him and tipped off the narcotic squad that Ferbert was double-crossing the officers. That ended him."

They laughed a little at that, then talked of one thing and another before:

"Eddie's been acting queer today. Said he delivered that note as usual, but young Donald didn't send the money as usual. We'll have to touch him up tomorrow. You know, our plan's to double the amount any time a guy balks. And make him pay. After that he comes through regular without a whimper. Thinks he's getting off at half-price."

"How much have we got on him?"

"Nothing much, but he doesn't know that. Before Hack was sure of Berny Waldrone she had this kid buying dope for her. He would buy the junk and turn it over to her, and as usual he had to sign a receipt for twice as much as given him. That shows what fools these fellows that have the yen are! They sign up, go on record—yell about having to do it, but do it anyhow. So if there is a crash, they don't dare holler; and their families step in and say, 'Sh-h-h!' to the officers.

"Then she—ho, Berny Waldrone got Hack to bar the young fool from the club here. Said she wouldn't come herself if young Don was around. She knows we're pulling his leg and laughs.

" 'Go to it,' she says. 'He's got plenty.' "

"Good kid, that girl."

"She's sure got Hack silly over her."

Again both men laughed a little, then—

"Some party we're going to have after the supper, eh?"

"Be some good playing. Dope makes 'em reckless. They play heavy. They have to come to Hack for dope—that brings 'em. If they try to stop coming he puts on the screws. And the wheel trims 'em. We've got the world by the tail."

"Well, we'd better get back down-stairs and see how things are going. Nice little crowd down there now."

"All right, come along."

And they went.

VIII

I HAD learned more than I expected to, but as there was no way of leaving without possibly creating a commotion, and as I had no particular reason for not remaining, I lay back and waited.

Miss Berny Waldrone seemed to be a very interesting young woman. I rather thought that I would like to meet her.

When the supper was over the people returned to the Arabian room and sat about on cushions, smoking and talking giddily.

Again some came into the doorway of my tent, and the curtain was more than once set trembling.

I also recognized the voice of the woman who had before been so curious about my personal appearance; and presently when some one said, "Bernice" she answered.

Some sort of vaudeville act was put on. I heard music and the tinkling of ornaments as dancers whirled about, followed by a pattering of hands when they stopped. There were other performers.

I knew that the form which showed its imprint against the curtain that sheltered me was that of Bernice Waldrone. She talked a great deal vivaciously and seemed to be having a good time. I thought, though I was not sure, that I repeatedly heard the voice of Hackintyre near by. I recognized it by remembering the smooth, soft, plausible tones of Mr. James of San Francisco.

After a time the vaudeville performance came to an end, and the spectators, who had dined well and been pleasantly entertained afterward, grouped themselves together; and some one suggested going down-stairs and trying roulette.

One of the little signs of genius that Hackintyre showed in the management of his affairs was the pretense that everything was for the accommodation and pleasure of his "guests." He never hurried them into gambling. He merely entertained, and when they felt like gambling, all the apparatus was at hand, and it was of course all crooked.

When all had gone from the room I lay back and meditated a little on what next to do. I am never impatient, I am seldom in a hurry, and I usually take my own time and do just about what I decide ought to be done. I was just about to venture out and possibly arrange a little meeting with Hackintyre and renew our acquaintanceship, when I heard a stealthy movement of soft footfalls within the room.

I could not imagine what was up, and I did not try very hard, for it seemed to be none of my business. However, the steps came nearer, passed, returned, paused—

the next instant the curtain was jerked aside and I was looking into a small automatic presented by a very good-looking young woman.

Quite young, she seemed to me, with reddish, fluffy hair and dark eyes, now frowningly severe. Her hands were jeweled. Her dress was some sort of flimsy yellow stuff with metallic threads glittering through its dainty transparency—not unlike a fabric of spiderwebs, layer on layer, besprinkled with dew, flashing in sunlight.

I was not caught off guard. I am never caught off guard. There is always some way out. My arms were folded, but an automatic—it's mouth big enough to have swallowed the one she held—lay over the crook of my elbow.

"Put up your hands!" she said, her throat rather tight; but I recognized the voice.

I shook my head slightly and glanced down toward my elbow, which she, in her excitement, had not noticed.

"Oh!" she said, a little startled, then remained quite uncertain of what to do.

All was not happening quite as she had planned.

"Suppose we call a truce and talk it over," I suggested.

"Just what do you mean?"

"You put away your gun and I'll put away mine."

"You do it first," she said.

I declined, shaking my head slightly and saying:

"No, because, you see, I haven't any wish to capture *you*—though I can understand why many unlucky men might think themselves fortunate if they did!"

She frowned mightily for such an unwrinkled forehead, but most of the frown was puzzlement; then—

"I knew you were here all the time."

"I believe you," I said, recalling how the curtain had trembled as if some one had peeked behind, and how she had edged people out of the tent, and how after the supper she had sat next to the curtain as if to keep any one from getting closer and perhaps making the same discovery that she had made.

"But," I added, "you appear to have wanted the honor of catching me all by yourself. I am sorry, but I decline to be caught, Miss Waldrone."

At that she widened her dark eyes and stared fixedly, trying to recognize me, and asked—

"How did you know?"

I had no wish to ease her of the mystery. It is always a great mistake to explain anything to a woman, for it is her nature to be contemptuous of what she understands. So I shrugged a shoulder and said nothing.

"I wasn't trying to *capture* you," she said. "If I had wanted to do that, I would have told everybody."

"But how much less honor you would have had! Any woman can scream. But you, you take the burglar single-handed."

"Honestly I was not trying to capture you."

"Then why——"

I indicated her gun.

"I just wanted to get you to do something for me."

"It would have been better if you had merely asked. I probably wouldn't have done it. I probably won't do it anyhow. But you might try putting that gun away and then tell me what it is."

"I thought if I could catch you then you would be glad to help me. I thought you might anyway. But I wanted to make sure. You put your gun away first."

"No," I told her.

Then after a moment's hesitation she turned suddenly—stopped; there was a rustling of silk, and when she straightened and faced about her hands were empty. So were mine.

"Now," I said, pointing to the couch, "sit down and tell me what it is."

She hesitated, her dark eyes going from me to the couch and back. Had I been a younger man than I was I would have thought her dark eyes very innocent, her face pretty. But I at an early age was too old to trust a woman's eyes, or her beauty. She looked quickly about the room, then—

"I am afraid some one may be looking for me in a few minutes."

"Yes, I understand. Hackintyre can not let you out of his sight for long."

That seemed to make her angry—quite naturally, since it was the truth. Her eyes blazed; her face, very pretty with the complexion that rouge and powder gave it, grew red.

"How did you know I was Miss Waldrone?" she snapped with a rather sharp tone.

"Just about in the same way that I know

you use up more cocain than is good for twenty women."

For a moment I thought that she was going to slap me. Her hand flew up and back, the dark eyes glowed, her small foot stamped the floor; then, relaxing, the hand came down slowly. Mystified, she asked—

"Who are you?"

"Merely a stranger in the city."

"You know Hackintyre?"

"I have met him."

"You are—are a friend of his?"

"Hardly that."

"Why are you here? Does he know you are here?"

Then with anxious doubt—

"Aren't you a burglar?"

"I? Oh, no."

"Oh! But—but it *was* you, wasn't it, who came in tonight from the balcony?"

"Yes, I came in that way. I wasn't sure that I knew the password, and I was looking for a party."

"Who?" she asked, doubting me.

"Perhaps you had better do most of the talking. You appeared to have something in mind when you came just now."

Miss Waldrone was quite doubtful, but very determined. She looked at me hard, then glanced quickly around and lowered her voice:

"Can I trust you? Do you want to make some money? You *are* that burglar, I know. Do you want to make some money?"

"What have you to suggest?"

"Listen!"

She bent closer.

"I know where Mr. Hackintyre keeps his money."

That was puzzling—then I said to myself that she, having no scruples at all, was as ready to trim Hackintyre as she had been ready to make a cat's-paw of Donald.

"I am to steal it, and we are to divide?" I suggested.

But she eyed me very distrustfully, not liking my tone; then—

"You are not Hackintyre's friend?"

"In a way perhaps. I have done one or two things for the good of his soul. He never appreciated them. I might do something more."

"What sort of things?"

"I once took several thousand dollars away from him in a poker game."

She did not smile, even frowned a little, and looked me over from feet to head; but she seemed more excited and less distrustful.

"You will do it?"

"How are we to divide the money? Fifty-fifty?"

"No. You keep the money. I want—want some papers."

"What sort of papers?"

"Letters, notes, things of that kind."

"I see. His material for blackmail. They would mean a fortune to you, wouldn't they?"

"Yes," she said quickly, then:

"No—no. That isn't why I want them. I have to have them. I have the right to them."

"In that case, why not get a policeman to help you?"

I was thinking of the I. O. U.'s and notes of the Senator's wife, the down-East governor's son, sons of the half-dozen men, any one of whom could quash an indictment against Hackintyre. With such evidence in those small, slim, jeweled hands she could powerfully thwart justice and levy blackmail. Hackintyre himself would be under her thumb. It looked to me as if I was being invited to join a sort of highjackers' war.

Highjackers are crooks themselves who war on bootleggers and dope-hucksters, confiscating the spoils and reselling them.

So this dainty creature with the firm mouth and purplish eyes with a hard gleam in them was playing a desperate game of double cross. There are depths within depths to that dark game; and if I helped her win it, I might still show her how it felt to lose.

"Why not get a policeman to help you?" I repeated.

"Don't be stupidly smart," she said. "Will you do as I wish—or shall I scream?"

She said it with a matter-of-fact firmness, as if screaming was one of the things that she did exceptionally well.

"You may scream all you like," I told her, not at all because I felt that way about it, but because I have learned that the fellow who ever allows a woman to get the upper hand with a bluff might just as well put out his hands and let her tie them.

"Then—" with a quick smile, a change of expression that was meant to be tempting and disarming—"I shan't. And you will help me, won't you? You can have all the money. I want the papers. Isn't that a bargain—fair enough?"

"What are these precious papers?"

"I have to have them! Hackintyre can ruin so many people. Don't you understand? He has got them from us when we were reckless, desperate. I mean to have them. I didn't intend to try for them tonight, but there is an unexpectedly good chance. I learned of that tonight almost as soon as I came into the house. I meant to try for them myself. Then when I found you here—I knew it before supper—I said—

" 'I will get that man to help me.'

"You are bold enough for anything, I know. Will you?"

Then she told me the situation.

IX

HACKINTYRE had a private office on the second floor; this was a rather large room, having formerly been a bed-chamber before the old mansion had fallen into his hands. His desk was there; his safe, where he kept the pawned jewelry of unlucky players; and there were wall panels in this room where he kept his records and evidence implicating people of such important families that he felt secure from prosecution.

His private secretary, who hardly ever left the room—sleeping there in fact—had been taken ill suddenly with ptomain poisoning. Miss Waldrone had learned this; and his sickness meant that there would be no one in this room tonight. She thought that a burglar could enter and work uninterruptedly.

She had an amazing faith in my burglarious ability. The office door was heavy and thick, and locked. But I, being a burglar, was supposed to enter it. There was a heavy safe, containing many valuables. Being a burglar, I, of course, would open the safe. Somewhere in the room was the secret panel with the papers she wanted. I could find it and break it open, couldn't I?

I said to her:

"Young lady, you play a fast and lawless game, it seems, but you know very little really about the underworld. It takes an artist to *blow* a safe, a genius to *pick* one; and if secret panels were so easily disclosed and entered as you think, they would not be very secret."

She regarded me doubtfully.

"I thought you could do all that easily in an hour!"

"You did? Well, I couldn't do it at all. And your idea is not to let Hackintyre know who robbed him? You don't want him to know that you had a part in it?"

She nodded, then quickly:

"I wouldn't care if we succeeded. But I wouldn't want him to know we had tried. He would kill me!"

"But if you succeeded, you would have him under your foot?"

I looked at her closely. Young, too young, for that hard gleam in the purplish eyes and the hard line, straightening her girlish mouth. Very pretty, artfully so, she was; dainty, with something about her that only girls out of good homes have, and retain for a long time after they have turned their toes hellward.

I told her that I couldn't open a locked door with anything less than a sledge hammer; that I couldn't open a safe, not even with a half-ton of dynamite; that panels were too much like puzzles for me to take much interest in their discovery.

"But where is Hackintyre now?" I asked.

"I got some of the boys to insist that he take the roulette bank. He wants to see me alone. I don't want to see him if I can help it."

"You go and bring him here."

"Here!"

She appeared really frightened, and said suspiciously:

"You are a friend of his? You are tricking me?"

"No, but I more than half-suspect that of you. Yet I am willing to trust you, though if you leave now, how do I know but that you will send a half-dozen men in here to catch me?"

"I swear to you that I am honest!"

"You will swear it just as readily if you were dishonest."

"Then what," she asked, a little bewildered, "can I say or do to prove it?"

"Bring Hackintyre here—into this tent. And pretend that you know nothing of me. I'll make him open that door and those panels. I can do that much."

She stared for a moment, then:

"He wouldn't! Oh, he wouldn't. He would rather be shot first!"

"And I may not have as much reluctance about doing that, too, as you think."

"Then you are his enemy? You came here to meet him—just him?"

"No," I told her. "There was another reason. But I may have had something of that kind at the back of my head. I'll explain it all in good time, if you bring Hackintyre here."

She hesitated. She did not know what to think, and was a little afraid; but still she had some faith in what I had said. Anyhow the result of a little more conversation was that she left, promising to return with Hackintyre.

I slipped on my silken mask and waited watchfully.

They came.

McIntyre James, or James Hackintyre—it makes little difference now what I call him, and both names were probably aliases, was a rather small, dark man, and sleek as a black cat well fed on canaries; he had a cat-like purr of voice, faintly guttural and easy in tone. Very sure of himself was this assassin who drove people to stab themselves with needles and sniff poisons deadly as lotus leaves. He had a small, swollen belly, like a full hot-water bottle, a small, black-haired head, black eyes, little hands, little feet, and a big opinion of himself. Diamonds twinkled on his hands and shirt-front.

He was now chattering as gleefully as a magpie that has stolen something; and at the roulette wheel where Miss Waldrone had gone for him he had probably stolen a good deal.

She now answered his remarks with nervous laughter. They came to the tent and sat on cushions. He tried to tell her what a beautiful girl she was, how other women had never interested him in the least, and how she was the most beautiful and lovely creature—on and on.

She naturally was a little uneasy, and no doubt wondered why I did not pop out and take the situation in hand. But I was taking my own time; and I would more quickly have taken up my part in the comedy but Hackintyre mentioned my young nephew. So I paused to listen.

"Oh, say, Berny girl, your friend Donald telephoned me this afternoon—said he'd been trying to get you. Wanted to know if I knew where you were, and would you be here tonight? I told him *No!* Haha-haha!"

"My maid told him I was out of town," said Miss Waldrone quickly.

"An awful boob, that fellow. He thinks you like him."

"Well, I don't!"

Her voice was sincerely waspish.

"I know it. I know it," Hackintyre repeated with satisfaction. "I lost good money in barring him from my club for your sake. He played like a fool. But there are other ways of plucking his tail-feathers. For a while you seemed to like him."

"For a while perhaps I did. I was using him."

"Ah-ha, and to think for a while I was doubtful of you! Lord, girlie! But it was right after that Ferbert nearly got in here as my secretary, and I was wary of strangers. You are a witch girl!"

"Don't—no—please!"

I looked from behind an edge of the curtain. He had seized her, was clawing at her with his lips puckered out to plant a kiss. I never could understand why a man, any man, wanted as desperately as it is often pictured in the movies and novels to kiss a woman that did not want to be kissed. But there are many things about this love business I do not understand, and I am not curious.

"Pardon me!" I said, pushing the curtain to one side.

HACKINTYRE nearly broke his neck twisting his face across his shoulders, and the girl sprang up with a startled cry which made me understand that she was a dangerously good actor.

"I am sorry to interrupt," I explained, "but my business is important. Hackintyre, kindly lead the way into your private office, where we can talk."

Hackintyre was staring at me hard, trying to glimpse my face beneath the mask. He asked:

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"To be shown into your office—and no more questions."

"Say, look here!" he exclaimed. "I'm caught. I'll pay. How much loot do you want?"

"We'll talk that over presently. Up, stand up!"

He stood up. I took a gun from under his shoulder.

"Now," I said, "both of you walk together, arm in arm. Don't look behind you. If we meet any one, you pretend that everything is all right. Don't look behind you.

And keep talking. Don't have such a solemn silence."

We walked from the room, they ahead. I removed my mask and stuck it into my pocket and put my gun out of sight. I was close behind them.

As we came into the up-stairs hall there was the merry sound of high voices from below—voices shrill with the giddiness of folly; with now and then a hush broken by the sharp, rapid clicking of an ivory ball as it danced over the spinning wheel.

We passed two or three people in the hall, one a middle-aged blonde woman, glittering with stones and silk, but with something of a frowsy, tinseled appearance—wealth but no taste—and she was laughing hard at what a blear-eyed youth was saying. She called:

"Hack—oh, Hack! Listen to this!"

"Can't now—busy," he answered with pretty much of a strain.

She and the blear-eyed youth stared at him, then at me; after which the two of them began to giggle drunkenly.

Hackintyre stopped before a door and tried it.

"Locked," he said, but without facing me. "I haven't the key here. It's down stairs."

I suppose he thought there was a chance of my telling him to go get it.

"Open it—now!" I told him.

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out some keys, muttering that one of them might fit, that he wasn't sure.

His nerve gave way, however, and the first key he tried fitted the door. He opened it, and with a quick movement started to slip through—and perhaps slam the door in my face.

"Just a moment. The woman first!" I told him.

Miss Waldrone went in. Hackintyre followed, and I was on his heels. I pushed the door closed behind me. Then with a touch to his shoulder I turned Hackintyre about.

In the midst of his New York success he must have forgotten for a time all about me. Certainly, whoever he may have expected to see, I was not the man. His little, black, snake's eyes glittered. There was a great deal of fear and a lot of hate in his manner. His dapper sleekness seemed to melt; but there was a vicious core in his heart, very like courage. At least in so far as it made him dangerous.

He did not use dope himself. Few big dope-pedlers do. They know too much about the stuff. He was afraid, not of his life, but of the money and trinkets in his safe. I had robbed him once. He thought that was why I had come again. In a way he was right.

I put him up against the wall. Miss Waldrone, without being spoken to, stood beside him. Then I looked at the door. When it was opened I had noticed that it was a very heavy door. Now I saw that three bars were arranged to fall across it. The police, if they came, would have a hard time to break in—but break in they would, though the door had been of steel. I didn't quite understand what Hackintyre hoped to gain by those bars. I glanced about. There were no other doors in the room.

It was a fairly large room, some fifteen by twenty-two or three feet, with not much chance of escape from windows if the police came, for they would surround the house.

I took Hackintyre with me and went across to examine the windows, for when I am in a strange place I like to know all about it. They were double windows, of a kind sometimes known as "storm-proof"—also sound-proof, and made permanently fast, with no regard for ventilation in spite of the fact that at one end of the room there was a small bed, partly shut off by a large wooden screen. This, I supposed, was where the private secretary slept. But why?

I looked about thoughtfully. Why would a man be kept night and day in this sort of a comfortable prison, shut off from escape if officers came? Through a lifetime of wariness I can sense when something is wrong, though I may not be able to understand; and for that reason I kept Hackintyre close by me. Miss Waldrone of her own accord kept close by him.

A flat-topped desk with nothing on it but a telephone was out on the floor. A heavy safe, some five feet high and about as broad, was against the wall.

This wall, on all four sides, was paneled with wood to a heighth of about five feet.

"All right," said I to Hackintyre. "Open the safe."

He made no objections, but went at once to the massive safe and turned the knob. In half a minute he pulled, and the door swung open.

"There!" he said venomously.

"Now open up your panel. I want to take a look."

And I vaguely gestured at the wall.

He whirled like a wounded cat, turning on Miss Waldrone.

"You've put up this job!"

And with fierce rapidity he cursed her.

Hackintyre had the sure instinct of the life-long crook who instantly detects, or at least suspects, the double cross; and from what he said I saw that he was remembering he had told her something of his panels; and he had not told any one else—so he said. Therefore, quite naturally, when I mentioned "panel" he put two and two together like a lighting calculator, and accused her.

She did not flinch. Her eyes glanced doubtfully toward me a time or two, and she eyed him coldly with a sort of satisfied composure. But I could tell from her glances that she was not wholly sure of me.

He wheeled toward me with his small, soft hands out, as if holding a platter, and almost shrieked:

"She's promised to pay you something. I'll double that! Name your price. Leave me alone with this—this——"

He made a fierce gesture toward her. Names that he wanted to call her were so crowded in his mouth that none of them came out.

"You're a square 'gambler," he cried at me, using a little flattery along with his bribing offer. "She's double-crossed me. You'll get yours to any amount you say. There's the safe—empty it. But leave me here with her. I don't blame you—" I thought it considerate of him to say that—"but this—this—this woman has led me on for months, then ribbed this up with you. Give me a chance at her. What did she offer you?"

"Oh," I said, as if a bit mystified and hesitating, "what have you to give me more than I can get anyhow?"

"This!" he cried and started toward the wall. I went with him. I didn't want him to get beyond arm's reach.

He touched the wall. One of the panels opened. I looked into a cupboard where money was piled as carelessly as in a treasure-box, heaped by pirates, buried in sand.

"There!" he said, pointing. "She didn't promise you that! There's ten times more than you expected to get. Put down that —— gun—let me 'tend to her!"

Miss Waldrone gazed tensely at me. Here, she thought, was temptation to try a man, a burglarious man. She had no way of knowing that I was already troubled with the weight of money; and, though nothing of a philosopher, had no love of gold.

"Don't be too sure I did not know of it!" I said sharply. "And whatever you do with this woman, this 'darling —— girl' "—I was quoting his own love phrase of less than twenty minutes before—"is of no interest to me!"

"She told you! No one else knew!"

"Who told me in San Francisco that your roulette was wired, your decks marked? Open up another panel or two. I like to see these little doors pop open."

"There are no more," he said sullenly.

"Shall I bring your secretary out of the hospital and have *him* show me?"

"He told you!" cried Hackintyre. "Ptomain—I thought he was faking that!"

"You are a very suspicious fellow," I answered. "First it is the woman you love who has double-crossed you, next it is the man of all men you trusted. Wouldn't any man know to look at the walls of this room—all this woodwork—that it was designed for concealed panels? Particularly when one knew as well as I that you have stuff to hide. Open them!"

That rather took the starch out of his knees and made him feel that he had been pretty much of a fool.

I probably would not have suspected panels without Miss Waldrone's information, but he had no way of knowing that. I had no particular reason or object in view in protecting her except that, of course, since we were in this together I wasn't going to throw her overboard—not for a pocketful of money anyhow. She felt, too, that I was not very respectful or friendly toward her; yet I had shielded her, and I caught her surprized, puzzled, doubtful stare.

"You are going to pay for this!" he cried recklessly at me. "I let you off before, but this time——"

"If I have previously failed to thank you for letting me off before, please accept my gratitude now. You let me off? Would you mind saying just why?"

"This," he said with sinister meaning, "is New York—not San Francisco!"

"And for a bundle of dope you can get a dozen men to take a shot at my back? Is that it? Oh, I know more about you than you think. I know your cocain and heroin comes in Swiss music-boxes, in Cuban sugar, in walnuts rejected by the consignee of Mexican ports."

"You—you a narcotic officer!" he shouted, and this time there was some real alarm in his voice.

"How many guesses do you want? You think I learn things from a ouija board, perhaps. I haven't yet spoken of your blackmail. But didn't your butler tell you? I mentioned blackmail to him. Now open those panels."

Hackintyre had a nearly cross-eyed expression in his small, gleaming, black eyes. He was murderous, mystified and highly frightened. He knew, or thought he did, that I would shoot him as readily as I would slap a mosquito.

But the look on his face was not more odd than on Miss Waldrone's; she seemed to be holding her breath as she stared at me; for, having bargained with what she thought was a burglar, she now did not know what to think of me.

"Open up those panels!" I repeated.

Hackintyre, small, dapper and breathing through his teeth, started determinedly toward another part of the wall; and I went with him. He changed his course a little, hesitated, then opened another panel—another cupboard-like affair—disclosing a cache of dope.

"There!" he said angrily. "That is all."

"Is it? Well, let's try again. You have a few I. O. U.'s, a letter or two, some papers and such that you are counting on to save you from arrest."

"Let me see your badge!" he cried. "You have no search warrant!"

"Oh," I remarked, "you are a queer one to want to see the law complied with. Like all crooks, you break all the laws that were ever made, then yelp for a search warrant. All right, look at it!"

And I almost touched his nose with the muzzle of my automatic.

He jerked his head back as if afraid it would bite; then with dejected insistence swore up and down that there were no more panels; that he had no I. O. U.'s because he did only a cash business; that I ought to be satisfied, having found all his money and all his dope.

I convinced him otherwise. I explained that he could either produce the things I wanted, or I would have men come with axes and tear his walls down.

"All right. You stay there. I'll show you!"

And he started for the wall; but it was hardly likely that I would stay where he told me. Hardly.

I moved right along by his side.

Again having started in one direction he changed his course and went to another part of the wall. With a gesture of anger he pressed some hidden spring, and the panel opened, disclosing shelves, mostly bare, with a few envelops, neatly piled.

"Now," he cried with somewhat of a threat in his voice, "are you satisfied!"

"I don't know yet," I told him.

Miss Waldrone at that moment deliberately gave herself away by snatching eagerly for the envelops, and after a glance or two exclaimed:

"Yes! Yes! These are what I wanted!"

"So it *was* you!" cried Hackintyre and jumped at her.

I swung the automatic alongside his head, and down he went.

"You've killed him!" said Miss Waldrone, peering down and shrinking.

"It will be quite convenient if he stays dead long enough for us to get out."

"Who are you? How did you know so much about him?"

"We have met before," I said, looking down at him.

He certainly seemed about as dead as a man ever is, though I hadn't meant to go that far. I wasn't greatly troubled, but I did not like the feeling of having killed an unarmed man. And I am not squeamish about what happens to dope-dealers.

Miss Waldrone had dropped into a chair at the desk and was running hastily through the papers.

As much to herself as to me she said—

"They are here—they are all here—I never thought I would get them!"

She reached for the telephone, and I reached out to stop her.

"Why? Who are you going to call up?"

She looked up, startled, with something still doubtful of me in her face. She was far from being sure of me, and had reason to be doubtful. Besides, in the intricacies of the crime game it is almost as dangerous to trust friends as enemies. I, too, was very distrustful of her. She was too pretty and too audacious.

"My maid," she said.

"You'll be overheard on the wire."

"No. This is a direct wire. I have to let Mary know I have these papers. There are people ready to commit suicide over these—she will let them know it is all right now."

She called her number, then:

"This is Miss Waldrone. I'm in Hackintyre's private office—have got everything—yes—yes—yes——"

Then I jerked the telephone from her hand and held the receiver to my ear. She clawed at it, and I overheard nothing. But the squeaking echo of a voice that had been coming over the wire as she talked had been no maid's voice—it was a man's. That is why I had snatched away the telephone.

"Now what are you up to?" I demanded; but I did not pause for an answer.

There was behind me the snap of a closing door.

I WHIRLED—and looked at a bare wall. Hackintyre was gone. He had not been so badly hurt as he pretended, and at last, without having me at his side, had got to a panel that offered an exit.

It was plain now why he had his trusted secretary living night and day in this room of apparently but one door. The panels would have baffled an ordinary searcher, such as might have got into the room, such as the woman and I; but if there was a raid the strongly barred door would check the officers long enough for the secretary to to gather whatever he had been instructed to carry off and to vanish through the hidden exit.

Miss Waldrone jumped from her chair and looked about the room, for a moment wondering how a man she thought dead could have disappeared.

Then she saw that I had gathered up the envelops from the desk and was putting them into my pocket.

"Oh, no—no!" she cried, reaching out. "They are mine! You promised— That is yours——"

She pointed toward the safe and cup-board.

"I promised nothing except to make Hackintyre come through. It is the papers I want."

"You? Oh, they are no good to you!"

"As long as *you* want them they are."

"Why, what do you mean!" she cried, puzzled and afraid of me.

"When we get out of here I'll tell you. But it was you, not Hackintyre, that brought me here tonight. And to whom were you telephoning?"

"I brought you here?"

"Yes. To whom were you talking?"

"I— What have you to do with me?"

"I'll ask the questions. You answer them. To whom were you talking?"

"A friend—he is coming right away, and——"

"A friend, eh? He will not find us here. If you want these papers, you come with me."

"Who are you? What is it you want? Please tell me? Oh, don't you see, I *have* to have them!"

She was pleading anxiously.

"Come with me then."

"I'll do anything to get them!" she said savagely rather than as if agreeing.

"All right. You won't have to do much."

I turned and opened the door.

Miss Waldrone cried—

"Throw up your hands!"

At that moment I was about as nearly caught off my guard as I have ever been, or shall ever be again, for that was one more lesson I learned.

Instead of throwing up my hands, I dropped; and as I dropped I swung the automatic, meaning to shoot her gun from her hand. There was a shot—it did not come from her gun or from mine; and by dropping I had probably saved my life, for if I had not dropped, Hackintyre, who had got into the hallway, expecting me to come through the door, would probably not have missed. He had picked up a gun, probably one placed for emergency in the passage that he had used to escape. As it was he rushed into view, thinking it was his bullet that had put me down, and he intended to settle with the girl himself for treachery.

I sent two shots at him, and either carried death; but there was also a third in him when he lurched forward through the doorway and lay on his face, both hands out and a gun in one.

The girl also had shot him.

Through the house there were cries and

screams; merriment had turned into panic.

"Come on!" I said to her. "We are going to get out of here!"

"No—no—wait!"

Her gun trembled indecisively. She was again half-minded to try to make me give up the papers.

"Throw that thing away!" I told her.

"They will try to kill us!"

"I would rather they tried it than that you did."

"Wait here—my friends are coming and——"

"I don't care to be rescued by your friends," I told her. "Drop that gun and come with me."

She dropped the gun, then:

"Oh, let me keep it! We are in danger—I swear I won't do that again— I will go with you——"

"Leave it!"

"No!"

She stooped with hands out, speaking before her fingers touched the gun, looking up at me.

"I don't know who you are or what you are, but you have promised me those papers if I go with you—and I am going——"

She snatched the gun, straightened, and with excited boldness:

"I'll fight my way out with you! You'll keep your word, I know you will. I'll go with you!"

There was a clatter and scuffle of feet in the hall, a flurry of voices.

People from below had run up. Women elbowed men to keep in front. I faced them across Hackintyre's body.

A woman screamed—

"Hack's dead!"

Several cried out; men gaped; there was a scattering of astonished oaths. Some called out to Miss Waldrone to know what was the matter, but she did not answer.

"Out of the way!" I said.

Forms moved to the right and left, shrinking against the wall.

"Back, all of you! Back—clear the hall!"

They edged back in silence. There was tinkling of ornaments, the rustle of silks, scrape of feet. No one spoke for a time. Hot-eyed, wide-eyed, they stared, at once shocked, fearful and thrilled. They walked backward a step or two at a time, pressing against those farther along who stopped to crane and stare. Back they moved, with servants coming up and pressing against the retreat. Voices began to whisper and break out:

"The burglar!"

"Berny Waldrone!"

"Hack's dead!"

"What's she doing with him?"

"They framed Hack."

Then from behind a woman some one cried—

"Take that!"

A shot followed.

He had a skirt to hide behind. The woman shrieked, leaped to one side and began frantically trying to run through the crowd. The crowd broke with her, shrieking and ran wildly. Miss Waldrone fired at the man. I fired into the floor. There were thirty or more people jammed in the hall. Some fell and were stepped on. It was panic and well might be. The man who had fired ran. I blazed again and again at the floor.

They were back to the stairs. Some had begun to go down; others had backed into the doorway of the Arabian room; then from below came a loud, frantic cry—

"The police are here—a raid!"

The crowd broke in flight in every direction with shrill cries and cursing; women wailed, thinking of what would happen if they were to be disgraced by arrest, and some one laughed.

"We are safe!" cried Miss Waldrone to me. "We'll tell the police——"

She clutched at my arm, but I caught her wrist.

"I don't want to see the police!"

Then I half-dragged, half-threw her through the door of the Arabian room. I slammed the door shut and slipped the lock.

A half-dozen people were in the room, running about like mad. I saw a pudgy man on his hands and knees, crawling about for a place to hide.

In the dining-room I met the butler. He knew me instantly, though my mask was off, and raised his hands. An intelligent fellow, that butler.

Miss Waldrone was at my side, saying—

"Wait—wait—let me tell you!"

"Be quiet!" I told her, and to the butler:

"The police are here. Get us down and out of here somehow. Understand?"

"Yes sir," he said anxiously, and started off at a queer little jig-trot.

We followed him into the pantry, into the kitchen, where burnished pans hung about, through a door, down a stairs—a long way down; then through a door and into a basement, and across this; then he opened another door that led into a dark, narrow passage.

"This leads to the basement next door," he said quickly, reassuringly.

Hackintyre's place had been arranged for just such an emergency in case the house was surrounded; perhaps from the paneled exit of his office one could also come into the basement and pass out next door. It was quite clever, and did credit to Hackintyre's forethought.

We crossed into the next basement.

"I am leaving too," said the butler, puffing.

"Can I give you a lift?" I asked, thinking his good turn deserved another. "I have a car waiting about a block off."

"Thank you, sir. If you don't mind, sir. I would like it."

"All right then; we'll all go together," I said.

"No!" cried Miss Waldrone firmly, stepping back. "I'll go no farther. Now give them to me—you promised!"

"If you would go with me, yes. You may think that you have gone far enough to escape the police, but it isn't the police that I care about."

She regarded me for a long time in a queer, half-startled way, then reluctantly said:

"All right. I will go through with it."

We went out from the basement of the house next door, and to my car, or rather to the "chummy" roadster which belonged to young Donald, and which I had borrowed.

X

IT WAS morning, a soggy, leaden morning, with the city's smoke low over the tall roofs. It may not have been smoke at all. It may have been clouds whipped in from the ocean. But it was a dreary dawn, and the streets were nearly empty. Here and there some man staggered along sleepily to an early job; and there was a hush over the city as if a pestilence had struck.

I drew up at the hotel curb and stepped out.

"Will you come with me?" I asked.

We had, at his request, dropped the butler some blocks away.

Miss Waldrone looked out at the hotel, at me, up and down the street.

"What is it you want? Why should I come with you? Who are you? Why were you at Hackintyre's? You said it was I that caused you to be there. I do not believe that. Why should I come with you now?"

"No reason at all," I assured her, "excepting that I wish it, and you appear to want these papers. You may have them all, excepting one envelop, within fifteen minutes."

"Which one?" she asked quickly.

"You will understand when I have explained."

"But I may not approve," she said.

"It will hardly be a question of whether or not you do approve."

"Why should I come with you, a stranger, into this hotel? I don't like it!"

"Odd, isn't it, when you go into a place like Hackintyre's, and as his guest of honor. You say you went there after certain papers. Your reasons for coming here are the same."

"I will come," she said.

Then quickly—

"You will really give them to me—in fifteen minutes?"

"Yes."

"Then I will come. I know this hotel."

The clerk stared at us, and the elevator boy from the corners of his eyes gave us furtive appraisal. No doubt the house detective would be stirred out of his easy chair and sent poking about the hall.

I opened the door of young Donald's den. She looked in, but drew back.

"No," she said, "I don't like it."

"I am glad of that. When I first saw it I came near sending out for an ax and torch. But come in. It doesn't represent my taste."

She entered. I closed the door.

"Notice, I am not locking the door behind you. You may leave when you wish. But sit down and wait a minute."

She sat down on the edge of a chair.

I went into the bedroom. There I found Donald, where, worn out, he had thrown himself in a dressing-gown. The strain he was under, and the sleepless nights of rowdy parties, had pulled him across the bed and into sleep, though he had meant to sit up and wait for me.

I shook him.

He stirred, grunted vaguely, pulled an

arm away, snapped, "Leave me alone!" and burrowed his face in the pillow.

"Come out of it! Get some of the stuff out of your ointment-pots that makes you look pretty and come with me."

The sting of the words roused him.

"Oh, you," he said. Then:

"She wasn't there! Now what have you got to say?"

"Wasn't she?"

"No! And don't try to welch—you pay!"

"If I have lost I'll pay—and so will you."

"She wasn't there, I tell you. I know because——"

"I also know," I assured him. "I saw her there."

"That's a lie!" he cried, and would have argued with me.

For an answer I hustled him, half-resisting, to the door, and pushed him through.

For a moment he stood as if knocked silly.

"Don!" she cried.

"Bernice!"

She jumped up, anxiously looking from him to me; and a handsome thing he was too, with his slick hair poking out like a brush-pile, his eyes dull with sleep, sunken and deeply ringed, his face thin and mouth open.

"Miss Waldrone," I explained, "I brought you here to say good-by to this young man. He leaves today for California—going on a little trip to the desert. He is sick of the city, of dope parties and high life. He's going to change his ways. And as you have quite an important place in his thoughts, I thought it well that you have a parting. Don—" I turned toward him—"I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Waldrone tonight at Hackintyre's."

"That's a lie!" he cried. "You weren't there, Bernice. You told me— I won't believe!"

"Oh, please, please, Don— I——"

She did not know what to say, and became silent.

"But, Bernice, you said——"

"I know, I know! It was wrong of me; but, oh, Don, if I could only explain all at once——"

"You were there?"

"Yes," she said a little wistfully, but not sadly; that is, not as if she regretted.

I was sorting the papers we had taken from Hackintyre. I found the envelop I wanted.

"Miss Waldrone," I said, "if you don't mind, I will keep these little receipts with Donald's name to them. There are the others. Unfortunately I am this young fellow's uncle. You have done your part toward making him a dope fiend—I don't know how far he has gone——"

"She, never! Stop that, you!" Don cried, turning on me. "She—she——"

"Also she was at Hackintyre's, after promising you that she wouldn't go. The guest of honor."

"Bernice, were you? Honest, were you?"

"Yes; but, Don—Don, let me explain——"

He turned unsteadily and rushed from the room, slamming the door.

I bowed slightly to Miss Waldrone, saying—

"You may go—when you wish."

She stared at me soberly, and her voice was low as she asked—

"You went there tonight because of him—because of me?"

"Yes. He was determined to marry you, and I wanted to prove to him that you weren't fit——"

"Marry me! Oh, I know—I see."

Then, blazing—

"Do you think I would marry a boy like that, no matter how rich he is!"

"You helped to make him what he is. You with your flirtation and dope—you had him buying dope."

"Listen to me," she said angrily and with a flare of dignity. "He is just a fool boy—he went to Hackintyre's and to all those places. He was in love with me, and I made what use of him I could. I would have used anybody. I tried to use *you* tonight. Sir, I am in the Federal Narcotic Service! My name is not Bernice Waldrone—it is Jane Ferbert!"

I can take a pretty stiff jolt without showing much of anything on my face. I now pulled at an ear-lobe, then scratched the side of my long nose and looked at her; then—

"A sister of that young Ferbert who nearly got the job as Hackintyre's secretary?"

"Yes. We were both in the service, and after what he did to my brother, I swore that I would get him, and I did!"

"You did. I congratulate you. You did. But why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Two or three times I almost did tell

you. It was to the chief's office that I telephoned. But I didn't know who you were or what you were after. I was afraid to tell you. I *did* try to make you understand that we had nothing to be afraid of from that raid.

"Oh, I meant to get the evidence that would fix Hackintyre and all the dope-dealers that he protected. I would have stopped at nothing. We could have arrested him any time, but we could never have successfully prosecuted him until we had those papers out of the way.

"I knew where they were, but I knew that secretary would carry them off if there was a raid. Tonight he was sick. I saw you behind the curtain in that tent. I didn't care how much you stole—so I said nothing at the time.

"But at supper I thought it would be better if I could get you to help me. I didn't expect you would be there after supper, but you were. I knew that if I tried to telephone the officers I might be overheard. I knew that when they came Hackintyre would have gone into his office the first thing and have got away."

I looked at her with what might be called new eyes. Strange, but call a fellow a crook and you can see criminality sticking out in every feature; find out that he is a saint, and in those same features, with your same eyes, you can see the lines of fine character. Now I was not quite so self-satisfied as I had been.

"Did Donald know it—know about you?"

"A little. He knew that I did not use the dope he got for me. He knew that I wanted to get evidence against Hackintyre. I did lie to him after I determined to go to Hackintyre's myself. I would stop at nothing, and I knew that if he thought I was there he would be wild and try to get in.

"I didn't want him there. I wanted him out of the way. So I had to tell him that I had given up the narcotic work, but he was pledged never to tell any one under any circumstances that I was in that work. I thought at first that he could help me, but he wasn't a good actor, and he was too much in love with me. I got Hackintyre to bar him from the club.

"You can see for yourself, he's just a silly boy. He is worse than silly—he drinks, runs around all night with a bad crowd, wastes money, has a good time. Cares for nothing else."

"Supposing that he was to turn into a pretty decent sort of man—would that make any difference in your attitude?"

"It can't be done. He is spoiled. And any man I ever care for will have to have been a decent fellow all his life. I don't want a made-over, doctored-up, reformed rake. I don't care to take what chorus girls and loose women have left of a man!"

She was magnificent, and beautiful. I liked her.

"Miss Waldrone—Miss Ferbert, I mean—I am usually fooled by every woman I meet, so I might have known you weren't what I thought. And I believe that Donald has enough of the real man left in him to feel that his money, his ointment pots, carved pipes and gay parties are pretty poor things in comparison with what he has lost.

"I started out with the intention of trying to make him realize that you weren't good enough for even him. Now—well, you understand.

"And, Miss Ferbert, you must be anxious to get to your chief. You are tired, too. As I look back, I don't think my manner toward you was very gentlemanly. I'll not try to apologize. Anybody that was so big a dunce to look at you as carefully as I did, and then think of you as I did, hasn't any right to try to creep out of it with an apology. Come, I'll see that you get a taxi."

XI

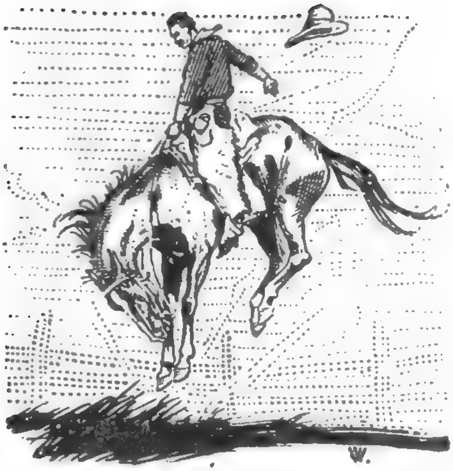
WHEN I returned to the room I found Don hurrying about, throwing things this way and that. The meerschaum with its naked women lay broken on the floor, where he had slammed it. Various little treasures of a sybaritic nature were tossed aside angrily when they came in the way of his hand.

I stood and looked at him for a few minutes, and he did not glance toward me.

I asked:

"What's the matter? What's up?"

"What's up?" he repeated, glaring at me from across his shoulder. "I listened at the door after I went out—I heard what she said. I *am* a rotter! I'm packing. I read that book last night. We take the first train for Death Valley!"



THE HORSE FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY

by

R.E. Hamilton

FEN HOWELLS shot Ollie Leroy one July midday. It was done in Ollie's kitchen at the A Bar Diamond ranch, when Ollie's two sons were branding a gelding and his daughter dangling her long brown legs from the top bar of the corral. Lee Leroy was the elder son. Uneasy at the hidden colloquy, he abandoned the branding and entered the house in time to see his father's body fall.

Fen climbed through the window and rode back to his own ranch, a 640 section away, whence he was extricated by the sheriff later, with much persuasion through the key-hole but with no bullets spent.

All through the dusty Summer Fen languished in the county jail, with his two hound dogs lying outside in the cool shade of the court-house—not that they loved their master more, but that they loved being hungry less. Mrs. Howells closed the ranch and came to live at the Palace Hotel. The citizens of Stampede used to watch her, pale and thin, not pretty with her watery light eyes, and awkward in her uneven silk dress, trudging every day with beer and tobacco for Fen and bones for the lean brown dogs.

Little boys peered through the bars for a glimpse of a real murderer. Tourists waiting in town between trains, or itinerant travelling salesmen who appeared in solitary dustiness driving their battered Fords and carrying suitcases of samples for the Golden West Emporium—these were regaled more or less accurately with the tragedy and shown the court-house window which the last murderer had kicked in "that time the boys got impatient and give a lynching from the flag-pole."

Most of the residents of Stampede visited the jail at some time or other, and many of the ranchmen of the county. But Lee Leroy waited in the A Bar Diamond ranch until October, branding the yearlings and digging a fence and riding no further south than to look grimly at the boarded windows of the deserted Howells ranch.

The jury acquitted Fen Howells one October Saturday at the Fall session of the court, with the court-room packed with farmers and stockmen in to hear the trial. Ponies were tethered to the rail before the post-office until it became an indistinguishable mass of leather knots. Cowpunchers had ridden sixty and even ninety miles to hear Fen "get his'n."

It was a windy Saturday. Women waiting in wagons had their shawls blown from their shoulders and their hair pulled into fluttering sun-bleached wisps. Baby cyclones circled up and down Front Street from the coal chutes to the red towers of the grain elevators. Balls of tumbleweed, the brittle skeletons left of Summer bloom, floated eerily past, rolling over and over and lodging at last beside fences or under the depot platform.

Along the bottom land on the banks of Bighorn Creek the cottonwoods were turning yellow. They were visible from the town, and even the red gashes that masses of rose-bushes cut in the landscape, their leaves fallen to the ground but the haws flaming triumphant and hard. To the south the range flowed, every bench clear cut in the sun and wind, rising to the brakes of the distant Missouri, and up there in the North Country, where Lee Leroy set his face on emerging from the courthouse, Triangle Butte squatted, inscrutable in the tossing sage-brush.

Lee was the first to leave the courthouse, and the crowd surged behind him, milling and arguing. The streets began to fill with knots of men in overalls, puttees and khaki, or dyed shaggy chaps. Talk, talk, talk. Feeling ran high, but there were both pros and cons—more of the latter since the acquittal. In fact some of the fiercest advocates for Fen's speedy demise were now his most ardent defenders.

"He kilt a bad man. Ollie got no more than he desarved."

"Ollie Leroy allus was a bad actor. Spent six months in Deer Lodge once for cattle-rustlin'."

"I did holt out for hangin', up till yesterday. But the evidence——"

"Breakin' up a man's home. That's pretty."

The voices were still when Lee passed the post-office rail, but he knew what they had said, were saying inwardly now and would continue to say when he had departed. He sent his brother and sister ahead on their pintos and stepped into the Golden West Emporium for supplies. He did not want company on the north trail home. There were certain things to be straightened out in his mind.

Little boys ran when they saw him approach. Big ones eyed him with a mighty awe.

"Honest, Lee," said one, "*are* you goin' to get Fen Howells? Gosh, you were grand when you stood up after the verdict and spoke. I was scared, but not so scared as Fen. You swore like —— at him and shook your fist, remember? Are you goin' to get him like you said?"

He pushed the boy away and entered the store. Returning with filled saddle-bags, he passed the post-office once more. The knots of men had increased. Many approached and hailed him, but he gave them no greeting, only smiled a little, unpleasantly.

"I ain't believin' a word of it, Lee," said "Shorty" Hooper stoutly, "and there's a good hundred of the boys that sides in with me. Fen's a dirty claim jumper. But the verdict's passed, and there ain't nothing we can do except lynch him, maybe. And I don't know about that—times ain't what they was. No spirit in the country since they let the farmers in—and the Polacks."

"Jedge" Collins elbowed—rather stomached his way through the groups—a twinkly little man, small at the poles and huge at the equator. He grasped Lee's hand with his right, while with his left he patted gently Lee's gray flannel shirt and withdrew through the front of it a black Colt.

"Now, Lee, he soothed, "don't go a-broodin' over what you riz up and bellowed at that no-account son of a cowhide. We all like you the better for it, but jest the same there's the law. And if some mornin' one of the boys comes ridin' in from Canady and passes Fen Howells stretched out on the prairie with a bullet in his necktie, why there ain't a blind mule in the county who won't know who done it. I'll jest holt on to this little keepsake till you cool down. Why, Lee, you can't go out and shoot up Fen. You ain't but a kid."

"I'm eighteen."

"Reg'lar grampa. Whoa, what's this?"

It was Fen Howells ripping past on a half-broke buckskin. The wind, which increased at the amount the Jedge exclaimed, sent a flock of tumbleweed spinning toward the rider. At this the little horse snorted, and startled into viciousness, began a series of cruel bucks. He curved his back, lowered his bald-faced head between his fore-legs and squealed with rage. Presently he began to seesaw. A flicker of admiration passed over the face of the Jedge.

"Bein' in the hoosegow all Summer ain't made Fen forget how to ride," he breathed. "He ain't losin' time uncrampin' hisself, anyhow."

"I wish he'd smash his rotten head," said Shorty Hooper venomously.

The rider sat braced with care, but not stiff, his body yielding easily to the upward and downward plunges of the buckskin. He never "showed daylight" nor lost his balance. The little horse, weary at last of futile struggling, stretched out into a straightaway up the north trail, his flight eventually diminished by fatigue until it became a sane lope, and the horse and rider vanished into a coulée.

"You're some rider yourself, Lee, but I bet six bits against a Mexican saddle that he can——"

Realizing the poor taste of wagering a son against his father's murderer, the Jedge bit off his speech.

Lee looked keenly at Shorty Hooper.

"You said you wished he'd smash his rotten head," he reminded. "Well, I'll tell you something. Some day he will."

"You bet," said Shorty Hooper sociably but without hope.

LEE LEROY rode home alone, his head plunged into the wind, his face bent over the streaming mane of Gingerboy, and his thoughts racing back to the court-house.

Now they were testifying for Lee. Bits of old scandal were stirred up against his father. His sentence to Deer Lodge for cattle-rustling. The time he shot up the Silver Eagle over a game of solo.

Presently there was Fen Howell's wife. He saw her sitting in the witness box, with her sleazy silk dress and pale, plain face. Fen had married her and lifted her from the filth of the shanties to the east of town and set her to scrubbing floors and dishing chow for him and the two ranch hands. She had no one but Fen, and she had lied to save him, steadily, with her eyes on the carpetless floor of the court-room. She had nothing to lose.

He saw the ranchers shuffling together, heads nod, faces grow wise.

"Unwritten law," came the whispers. "They'll acquit him."

He saw the jury enter. He heard the verdict. He saw himself arise, fist-shaking, cursing.

"It's a lie, a —— lie," he heard himself shrieking. "I told you the truth when you had me on the stand. It was about the fence they quarreled—the fence, I tell you—not the woman."

He turned to Fen.

"You shot him in cold blood, for my father's gun was out in the corral. I came in and saw him fall, and you kicked him. You kicked him while he lay there dead, but I'll get you, you ——! I'll get you."

They dragged him back, stifled his curses. The court was adjourned.

The sun was setting, clear and red in the clean-swept sky, and the wind dying with it. Gingerboy broke unchecked into a gallop, and a coyote slid behind a rise of bad-lands as Lee rode by.

"And I'll get him," muttered Lee to the prairie. "I said I would, and I'll get him. Only it'll take time."

The Leroy ranch consisted of four full sections of grazing land, purchased and inherited and homesteaded. Lee and his brother rode fences all the next day, mending wire and driving posts.

"Buddy," said Lee, "think you can manage the ranch next week? I'm going up to the north country for a spell."

"Sure," said Buddy. "Ain't nothing to do except brand them two mavericks and whitewash the bunk-house. Lem and Chris went up to the hills after the cattle that broke fence, and Long Pete is ridin' herd."

"I won't be back for a week, maybe two or three. Never mind what for. If Fen Howells comes near our fences, don't do nothin'. Keep outen his way. He won't come inside. Pop's gun is in the bunk-house, but you won't have to use it. Look after Vangie."

The next day he saddled Gingerboy and rode away. He loped north, toward the Canada line, through a region of blowing prairie grass and the rare wheatfield of a squatter. Sometimes he passed a knot of horses, and whenever he did so, he reined his mount as close as possible and watched them keenly. Once or twice he roped some particular horse, saddled him and let him go to watch his antics. Some of the ponies were partly broken and would not buck. Others plunged about, but not viciously. He chased them bare-back, roped them again and retrieved his saddle.

The fourth day brought him to a point northeast of the A Bar Diamond ranch. He approached a house of whitewashed cottonwood logs topped by a sod roof. The entrance was marked by a heap of buffalo horns piled neatly for ornament—skulls and horns of long dead herds, stumbled upon by the rancher while searching for lost stock. As Lee entered the wired gate a tall man with a grizzled beard the exact shade of his undyed chaps came to the door—one "Old Man" Jeffries, once of Mexico City.

"Howdy, Lee," said the Old Man.

"Howdy, Jeffries."

"They tell me they ain't a-goin' to hang the man that murdered your pa."

"That's right."

"Law ain't what it used to be. Why didn't you shoot him, cowboy?"

"The Jedge took my gun, Jeff. However, that ain't what I come to say. How's the horses?"

"So-so, Lee. But times sure is ——. No more market for them than for a bunch of gophers. Much as I hate to tell ye, I up and planted a parcel of wheat this year. A man can't starve."

"You turnin' farmer? Well, I'm a son of a gun."

"Sure, a neat quarter section. Got thirty to the acre, too. But I didn't take no pleasure to it. A Swede's perfession. Want to buy some horseflesh?"

"Maybe."

Old Man Jeffries approached the corral where a saddle-horse was tied, mounted and led the way to the east range. Forty or fifty horses appeared presently, grazing in coulées and on the shady side of a bench.

"Take your pick, Lee. That little paint horse is gentle as a lamb, and the bay mare down by the juniper——"

"I ain't lookin' for a saddle-horse, Jeff. Got any —— raisers?"

"Them two black studs is brothers, and for plumb oneryness they beat most anything. But why——"

"Let's see 'em in action."

After much difficulty, and with a piece of leather being bitten off the Old Man's jacket, one black horse was saddled, and the men stood back to watch him. He bucked for several minutes, and the exhibition was no mean one, but Lee shook his head.

"Git astride him, then."

Lee ran up with silent speed, and vaulted into the saddle.

"Whoopee! Ride him, cowboy!" shouted the Old Man. "Watch him sunfish. Shake him, Tar Baby. Cut loose on him. Wow, the saddle come off."

"He's a mean one," admitted Lee, dusting his trousers and picking up the saddle, "but he ain't wicked enough. What I want is a real undertaker's pet. Closest approach to a man-killer you can find. How about the brother?"

"You rode the meanest of the two," admitted the Old Man.

"What did you do with Sixshooter?"

"Sold him to a rodeo outfit in Canada. Say, *caramba*, I just happened to think. Last week I seen a pinwheeler."

"Now you're talkin'. Where was he?"

"Ross Evans had him. Bought him off the Injuns. A real bronc, Lee, black as coal. Ain't never been branded. Ross thought he could break him, and he dum near broke Ross." The Old Man chuckled.

"He cussed him, good and savage, and kicked him loose on the open range. He's somewheres into Canada by now."

"Thanks, Jeff. That's what I'm after. He went north, then?"

"Due north, son. But what you want with a pinwheeler?"

"Maybe I'll tell you when I come back, maybe I won't, either. But you'll see me here leadin' him past your door if it takes all Winter to find him. So long."

IT DID not take all Winter. Riding north in the open prairie, inquiring at far apart ranches for a black, unbranded horse, in twelve days Lee returned, leading a stallion who dragged at the hackamore unwillingly. He was a coal black, with small red eyes and redder, wider nostrils. Gingerby disliked the appendage intensely, and shyed away to a wide distance from the frequently bared teeth.

"He took to the hackamore kind of calm," said the Old Man.

"He don't mind that much," admitted Lee. "But—" his eyes lighting up—"what he does to a saddle! Say, I'm ridin' with stirrups and a blanket. He plumb ruined mine. Done a pinwheel on it twice, and then stomped it to shavin's. Plumb bit the saddle-horn off of it."

"Wonder he didn't kill you," said the Old Man, amazed.

"Tried him mostly jest with the saddle. No, Jeff, I larned somethin'. It's this."

He leaned forward and emphasized every word sharply, and there was a red light in his eye not unlike that of the black horse from the north country.

"He bucks three minutes straight. Bucks like ——. There ain't no sech a outlaw from Juarez to Saskatoon. And at the end of the third minute, Jeff, he pinwheels."

They loped away to the north, Lee grinning back at him from the thickening sagebrush, and the black horse with bared teeth maneuvering ever nearer to the unwilling Gingerboy.

Old Man Jeffries watched them disappear with puzzled brow. Then, suddenly slapping the chaps that seemed another outcropping of his great grizzled beard, he burst out to himself:

"The stampede. *Valgame Dios*, I bet that's it! I don't quite see his game, but I wouldn't miss it nohow, not for a barrel of Johnny Walker. And ten months to wait for it."

* * *

THE Holden County Stampede of which Jeff spoke was a two-yearly event occurring on the Fourth of July. On the year in question, after a close Winter and a Spring that had made a most belated smile, the pent energy of the people burst forth into hilarity for this first holiday. The first days of July found ranchers straggling into the county seat, families and children piled in wagons or Fords, and solitary riders converging in from all directions on trails dimmed from infrequent usage. Nine o'clock in the morning of the Fourth saw the grandstand—high on the bench overlooking the town—packed with families, while a crescent of automobiles and wagons stretched half around the circle where the events were staged.

On either side of the stand were chutes, two of them, where the steers and cattle to be ridden would be herded and released one at a time, by a gate that lifted to let each pass and then dropped quickly.

A rodeo company had supplied most of the wild horses, but many ranchers—Old Man Jeffries among them—were in the habit of entering outlaws from their own stock. Lee's father had brought down several notorious buckers in the old days, so the appearance of a coal black horse from the A Bar Diamond Ranch caused no comment.

"Are ye entered for any of the prizes this year, Lee?" asked the Jedge, casually lifting a couple of youngsters by the backs of their dresses, like kittens, and placing them in the safety of the grandstand.

"I ain't after a prize," replied Lee, browner and heavier than the Fall before. "But I'm a-ridin'. Only once or twice, maybe. But I'm a-ridin'."

"Me too," put in Shorty Hooper, "but I'm fallin' behind each year. I'm figurin' on Fen Howell's takin' the big money—him or the Injun from Big Timber."

"Seen that Texas steer they got roped in the sheds?" asked the Jedge. "Folks around here ain't never seen nothing but shorthorns. They's a crowd around him so thick you can't scarcely get through it. The Injun's goin' to ride him, likewise the Bailey boys. Think you'll take a chancet on him, Lee?"

The representative of the A Bar Diamond shook his head.

Old Man Jeffries came slouching through the crowd in his dusty chaps.

"Brung your horse in, Lee?"

"He's entered long with the rest."

"What do folks think of him?"

"Not much. He looks kind of little alongside of Funeral Wagon and Shootin' Star."

"What you call him?"

"Retribution."

"Kind of a peculiar name. Where you goin', Jedge?"

"All set to begin. There's goin' to be a pyrade first. I got to announce it."

He trotted away with his monster megaphone.

Led by the town band, the prospective riders and bulldoggers circled the stand—twenty odd, all youngish men, Fen Howells the oldest. Lee was there and Shorty Hooper, both loudly cheered, Lee having taken prizes two years ago and Shorty being a well-beloved veteran. The "Injun" received a generous ovation, also the renowned Bailey boys.

Lee recoiled at the clappings and stampings that heralded Fen Howells' entrance. So they had forgotten the shooting and the trial, and the orphans at the A Bar Diamond. And that bad-man who had rustled cattle and shot up more than one game of solo, but had been a good spender and a family man—he might rest in his grave followed by a few regrets and reminiscent sighs. But there were cheers for his murderer who rode a close saddle and sat them pretty.

He fingered the fringe on his chaps. Well, there was one cowboy that hadn't forgot Ollie Leroy, and there was going to be one man less climbing down the hill from the grandstand at sunset than had climbed up it in the morning. It might be this cowboy, or it might be Ollie Leroy. It might even be both.

The forerunners of the parade sat down in the shade of the stand to watch the end of it. The crowd was cheering "Idaho Lizzie" and "Roundup Anna"—two cowgirls who travelled with the rodeo outfit—lean women, brown and wiry, with steel muscles and graceful saddles. A pair of clowns followed on mules, one in blackface make-up, one masquerading as a girl with cheesecloth veils and pink calico. Those of the bucking horses that could be led with hackamores brought up the rear, also a few bewildered steers driven through with cowboys guarding them on either side to prevent their galloping away. The Texas steer with great spreading horns tossed his tail and made lunges at any one near his path.

"Only real mean steer I ever seen," said the Old Man meditatively. "Ain't none like him hereabouts. Maybe one of his great-grandpaws was a bull from the fights at Mexico City. Sech things has happened."

The forenoon of the "Stampede" was devoted to some bulldogging, also racing and demonstrations by the Baileys and other ranchmen of lately acquired Eastern horses, both Percherons and saddle-stock, which competed as to points and for which prizes were awarded. Lee reclined in the scant grass in the shade of the grandstand and watched but took no part.

"Why ain't you in on that Roman standing race?" inquired Shorty, returning with a second prize for speed in roping and tying a steer. "I seen you do that stunt twicet as good as the Injun. Yippee, watch 'em come! Long Joe Bailey's hat's fell off. Yippee, watch 'em come. Say, I think that kid from the South Bench's drunk. He can't keep to both horses a-tall."

Three cowboys, each riding two horses, came tearing down the track nearly abreast, standing erect with a foot on either mount and holding the bridle reins of each horse at the exact tautness to force their strides even. The Injun was in the lead, with firm footing and skilful balancing. He passed the grandstand in a whirl of dust, close followed by Long Joe Bailey. The kid from the South Bench, who had celebrated the Fourth too unwisely and swerved from one horse to the other on his dangerous circuit, fell off into the arms of a group of jocose friends, pale and sick, a bad third.

The heat intensified and "lazy lawrences," the heat waves, danced on the browning benches and along the sides of Triangle Butte. Down in the valley the noon whistle blew, and the Jedge heavily mounted his horse and announced the discontinuation of events for lunch. A few people straggled back to the town; most of them stayed in the grandstand or slouched in cars consuming sandwiches and pop vended by little boys. Lee ate nothing but drank feverishly of tepid water from a pail. At one o'clock the events began again.

The after-lunch torpor faded. The bucking horses commenced their inning, and the excitement grew by leaps and bounds as outlaws of former years made their flying appearance. Shooting Star, generally unridable, was vanquished by the watchful eye, the sharp spur and the sure saddle of Fen Howells, to the accompaniment of cheers that sank like lead into the sore heart of Lee. Rocking Chair went back to the sheds after another victory, unridden. The voice of the Jedge through the megaphone bawled out every few minutes, "Art Bailey ridin' a buckin' steer, Sassafras, with a surcingle," or "Shorty Hooper ridin' Prickly Pear, mane and tail holt, out of Chute Two."

Horses penned inside the chutes beat against the wooden bars and strove to leap over the rail. A roan mare, rearing high, cleared the top of the gate and broke away across the oval to freedom. There were a few casualties. One of the numerous Bailey brothers caught his spur in a surcingle and was dragged forty yards by a bucking steer, rescued at last with his shoulder broken. Shorty Hooper, valiantly riding every kind of horse and cowflesh, stuck to a stallion that wearied of bucking and broke into an insane gallop over the field. A comrade, racing out on horseback to overtake and catch him on his own mount, pressed too close and bruised Shorty's leg badly between the two saddles. One steer, on being roped, had its neck broken.

Each succeeding accident sent a fresh wave of nausea over Lee. When Old Man Jeffries ambled across the grass and lay down beside him he was immersed in a sea of nerves.

"You ain't ridin' none," Jeff remarked.

"Not yet."

"Where's your pinwheeler?"

"You ain't told no one he's a pinwheeler?"

"No."

"Seen that number on the program marked 'Special'? That's him."

"Oh. Kind of mysterious, ain't you?"

Lee did not reply.

"Say, I been noticin' them fellows that raises the gates to the chutes, Lee. They had a heap of Canada moonshine under their belts. They lets them animals out too fast. *Corpo de Dios*, watch 'em once. They don't wait for the ground to be cleared after one event, they just lets a couple of wild steers loose without no warnin' whatever."

"Say, if anything else goes wrong, I'm through. I'm sick, Jeff, I— Oh I didn't know as I'd find this so hard. What's the cheerin' for?"

It was the fourth attempt at riding the horse Funeral Wagon, one of the rodeo animals never ridden yet.

"Shorty tried him, and the Injun, and the kid from the South Bench," remarked the Old Man. "Now, who's this."

"Fen Howells riding Funeral Wagon out of Chute Two," bawled the Jedge.

"Ride him, cowboy," shouted the crowd.

Fen stood poised, astride the top of the chute awaiting the moment when the gate should be raised and the horse rush out between his legs.

"There he goes," said Lee, half-rising.

At the right moment Fen let himself drop, taking careful seat. Catching the rythm of the plunges, he began to sit them pretty while the cheers grew. Funeral Wagon gave a few preliminary bucks, haphazard, and then began beaming-ending—coming down first on his forelegs, then on his hind hoofs.

"He knows all the tricks," said the Old Man. "Watch him feint a side throw. Then up he goes, up, clear up in the air. Ride him, cowboy."

Lee said nothing but twitched at the vivid red handkerchief at his throat as if it were choking him.

The cheering increased as the cowman stuck. Funeral Wagon lasted for four minutes, ending in a violent sunfish, and quit sulkily. The grandstand was wild with excitement. Hats were soaring. The band struck up a gay air. All along the crescent of automobiles horns honked their praise. It was the only time Funeral Wagon had ever been conquered.

LEE rose and with a final jerk tore the offending silk handkerchief away.

"Here's where I commence," he said huskily, rising.

"Good boy, here's luck," said the Old Man, rising too and holding out his hand.

Lee clasped it, turned and edged slowly along the stand toward the chutes. A breeze springing up for a moment, struck his forehead coolingly, and his clogged brain cleared somewhat.

The next event, already begun, passed without undue excitement. The shadows of the horses, cars and fences grew long on the grass. People began to glance toward the end of the program.

Then deliberately, gravely, the Jedge mounted his horse and raising his megaphone announced that Funeral Wagon had been caught again and would be ridden from Chute Two, this time by Lee Leroy.

The stand creaked with excitement. A few of the more hilarious leaped over the railing and crowded down on the field to get a better view. Whispers shot like sparks along the benches and up the aisles. Lee Leroy, who had been silent all this day—he was up at last and riding against the man who had killed his father.

Lee Leroy rode Funeral Wagon for four rib-bursting minutes, while the streak of demoniacal wrath beneath his knees plunged and lurched through nearly every trick known to horseflesh. Lee's hat flew into the stand, and the perspiration flowed like water down his dusty face. About half the age of Fen Howells, and with all those years less of experience, he stuck to the saddle more through his nerve than any superior skill, suffering far worse punishment than his predecessor because of lesser knowledge, but never yielding all the same. At the end of four minutes—the same length of time that Fen had taken—he slid from the saddle and walked back, behind the stands, oblivious of cheers.

There was one more bulldogging contest—uncheered and little heeded. The audience stirred anxiously. Something was in the air. Eyes fell to the next to the last event upon the program, the number marked "Special."

The winner of the bulldogging contest marched dustily up to the soap-box and took his prize. A silence fell, broken only by the battering of horns and the thumping of the few heavy bodies of animals still remaining in the chutes.

The Jedge fingered the program nervously, spoke uncertainly, forgetting his megaphone.

"Lee Leroy is the next number on the program. He has something to say to you all."

Heads turned in all directions, mostly toward the nook where Lee had lain silent through previous events. However, he approached from behind the sheds, where he had given a last inspection of Retribution. He came slowly in front of the grandstand but faced none of the spectators. Instead he directed his words toward the group of cowboys who lay in the shade of the stand, those who had ridden in previous events and rested, weary and streaked with perspiration, in the scant buffalo sod. In their center sprawled Fen Howells. Lee spoke softly, and his uncertain voice would not have penetrated far had not the utter silence that swooped down over the stand carried his words to the topmost seat.

"They's two of us here today that's ridden horses never been rid before," he said. "That proves we're both pretty much equal when it comes to settin' pretty. Well, I got a horse here I aim to ride—a new horse. And I challenge Fen Howells to ride him too. If he can ride him and I can't, it proves he's a better man. If I can and he can't, I'm better."

The spectators turned toward Fen as if on a single pivot. The object of their gaze was surprized but unabashed. He looked around him, grinning, with a slight shrug of deprecation.

"Bring on your horse," he said evenly. He did not look at Lee.

Lee nodded and climbed the bars of Chute One. Retribution eyed him evilly through red lids. This horse did not chafe angrily in the pen as the others had done. He waited quietly in the corner for whatever fate had in store, and he nipped with swift barings of teeth at two boys who, perched on the sides of the pen, were tightly cinching the saddle.

Presently the gate lifted, Lee dropped, and they were off. Spectators awaiting the egress with breathless interest felt disappointment to see a coal black horse—not especially powerful, even a little undersized—trot steadily through the chute and before the stand. But the disappointment was quickly dispelled. Eight paces from the mouth of the chute the horse stopped, shook himself and became a whirling volcano.

So fast were his motions that they could not be followed. He sunfished, he "swapped ends," he seesawed. Three times Lee was half-flung from the saddle, his body in the air and his hold retained by one stirrup; three times he regained the saddle. Each of these times he necessarily lost motion and descended while the horse was bounding into the air, with an impact that it seemed must jar loose every bone in his body. Yet he regained equilibrium and was not thrown.

At last he glanced away from the twitching muscles on the horse's neck—heralds, some times, of the next move an animal will make—and stared at his strap wristwatch. The next moment he had leaped from the saddle and landed on the turf, and the black horse was standing quietly in the center of the field. Cheers thundered from the stands and died away around the semicircle. Lee returned to his place.

There was a colloquy of cowboys, Fen, the Jedge, the Old Man. Riders galloped out to wrangle Retribution and drive him back to the chutes, where he was given a breathing space. No one was exactly at ease. It was hinted that there would be shooting. Some of those in the front seats of the stand climbed higher up. A few cars in the crescent, loaded with children, withdrew from the scene of scrimmage with panicky coughings and croaks. The black horse stood in Chute Two, waiting calmly, though wet with foam and panting a little.

Lee lay on his stomach, alone, having turned deaf and ungracious ears to friends who came to congratulate or question. Even when the Old Man returned to him he was met by an averted face. Jeff however sat down in silence, watching his friend tear the blades of grass with vicious clutches.

Presently Lee spoke, the words tumbling from his lips in monotone.

"It's murder, Jeff, ain't it? I know it is. But he murdered my pa and I can't get him no other way. He shot Pa unarmed. It ain't no worse to kill him this way. Still, it ain't too late."

Jeff warned him. "You can't stop it now without you give a reason—without you give it away that you aimed for Fen to ride a pinwheeler."

Lee stared at him.

"That's right. No, it better go on." His eyes strayed to the horizon. "But what if he busts himself up so as to be crippled and not die at all? Crippled for life. Or if the saddle horn gores him, he might sweat in agony hours before he died.

Or, he might— But I can't stop it! It's gone too far."

The minutes melted away with the sunlight. A red glow spread across the prairie from the west and cast streaks of light through the gaps in the stand and onto the silent circle of grass.

The Jedge mounted the box.

"Fen Howells," he announced, "ridin' the Injun bronc Retribution outen Chute Two."

Fen trotted out into the reddish light. Again, eight paces away, the black horse stopped and the bucking began. There was no lessening of the plunges this time. In fact they seemed to increase in violence. Up and down the horse went, in a perfect rhythm, like a wooden horse on a pole in a merry-go-round, but infinitely faster. Then, swerving abruptly to the left, he shifted his rhythm, hoping to catch his rider off guard. But Fen shifted as quickly and rode in unison. Retribution spun around in a sunfish, swinging as he bucked in a leap like a dancer's, so that his forefeet came down alternately where his hind feet had been. And still the rider remained unbeaten in the saddle.

A frightened cheer rose in the grandstand.

Old Man Jeffries cheered likewise.

"But it ain't for the man, it's for the horse, Lee," he said. "That's the plumb gamest animal I ever seen. I'll buy him off of you any price, jest to have."

The little horse was covered with foam; foam from his mouth wafted in tufts to the ground. Two minutes were up. Two seconds more. Then a voice shrieked at the rider.

"Get off of him, Fen. Off of him! Jump!"

A figure raced from the shadow of the stand and whirled frantic arms.

"Jump, Fen, jump off of him quick. He'll kill you, he's——"

The last words were drowned by confusion from the stand, cat-calls and derision.

"He ain't outrid you yet."

"Leave him ride."

"Another minute and he'll have you beat."

Jeff and the Jedge hurried out, and the Jedge took Lee by the arm.

"You're confusin' Fen. Let him ride, Lee, he's all right. Folks think you're gettin' him rattled a-purpose."

"No, no," shouted Lee, jerking the arm away, "that horse——"

"Look," said Jeff.

A little to the south of the field's center was a rise that the efforts of the town council had never succeeded in levelling. Retribution shook himself, stared at this rise and headed for it with a burst of speed. Only one or two of the oldest timers among the spectators guessed his intent, and their shouts of warning were lost in the applause. The rest believed that the horse had been beaten, and that, like most of his kind, he was finishing the exhibition with a runaway from which Fen could shortly be rescued by swinging to the horse of a pursuing rider.

Retribution raced up the rise like a comet, a long trail of dust clouds following him. At the crest he gave a tremendous forward spring, turned a half-somersault and landed crashingly on his back.

The applause died like the exhalation of a breath.

"A perfect pinwheel," said Jeff. "The saddle-horn must be bored clear through Fen's stummick." And with lowered voice, "You've sure avenged your daddy, cowboy."

"Yes, I—no, Jeff, look at 'em. He was throwed clear, thank God he was. See him turn over? He's goin' to get up. But Retribution——"

"*Valgame Dios*, Retribution is dyin', son. He must have plumb bust his back."

From the confusion in the stand a sharp cry went up. It was several seconds before the pair caught its meaning and distinguished it from the shouts of relief and exclamations of pity. The overzealous boys at the gates had set loose the last number on the program, the wild Texas steer. The Injun from Big Timber had attempted to ride it, but had been thrown a few yards from the mouth of Chute One.

The steer galloped diagonally across the red field in an undeviating course, while those from the stand who had leaped the rail to see the riding, crowded back to safety. Jeff and the Jedge dragged Lee away to the fence. There was nothing on the field but the thrown rider and the dying horse.

"Hy, you Fen," bellowed the Jedge; "he's chargin' you. Clear, I tell you, clear!"

One of the Bailey boys struck his

saddle-horse into a gallop and tore across the field in a short cut from the south to pick up the horseless rider.

Fen saw him coming and hailed him casually. As he had climbed to his feet, he had faced the south and his back was half-turned on Chute One, on his right. He did not see the steer. The Bailey boy slowed his horse a trifle and leaned far to the side of the saddle to swing Fen up behind him.

Fen was beating the dust from his chaps. He waved away the proffered hand.

"Wheel and come back, Bailey," he yelled as the horse and rider swept past, carried by volition. "I got a score to settle with this —— first."

He turned to the left, to Retribution dying in the dirt beside a little clump of cactus and the withered stalks of soap lilies, and he kicked him twice, violently. The horse attempted to raise his head, with a last effort of the old, brave belligerence, and died.

"The dirty snivellin' coward, the——" The Old man was incoherent.

At that moment the steer got Fen. There were two thrusts of monstrous horns, given with head slightly turned, and a passing trample of hoofs. No more.

After it was over, Lee and the Old Man rode home together.

"I'm glad it turned out as it done," said the Old Man. "If you could have shot Fen, in the first place —— I always held out for a good clean bullet. But that there stunt of making him ride a pinwheeler unbeknownst, that smells like a Mexican stunt. It's a good thing no one suspects you knowed he was a pinwheeler, ridin' him yourself thataway. Still, *sangre de Dios*, it was excitin'. I wouldn't of missed it, but I'm glad it was took out of your hands."

"So am I. But I'd sure like to have kept Retribution."

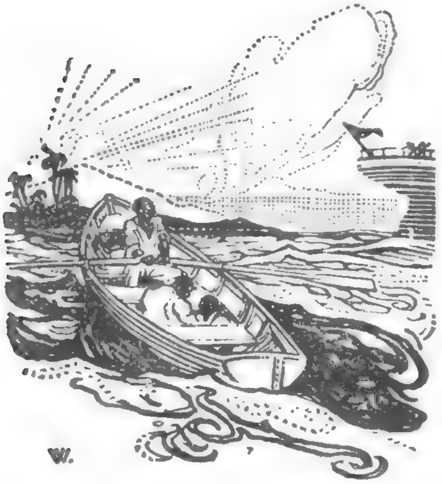
"He was a horse. Say, cowboy!"

"What's chewin yuh?"

"Say, *valgame Dios*, I'm a squaw if I don't quit farmin'."

"No!"

"Yessir, from now on, I've corraled my last string of wheat. This country was meant for the range man, and horses. And hereafter I raise horses or I starve."



THE THUMB

A Complete Novelette

By

Kingsley Moses

"THAT big, ugly bum; I don't trust him," remarked the first mate, reaching for the cold fried potatoes.

"The first assistant?" said the third officer, from his seat at the foot of the table, opposite the captain.

"Him," was the mate's succinct reply. "I'd log 'im, I would."

"Would you?"

The captain, his uniform coat comfortably unbuttoned, white shirt open at the throat, closed one cold blue eye and surveyed the mate quizzically.

"I suppose if you were master of this ship——"

"Oh, I didn't mean that, captain," hastily interpolated the first officer, who was a sight handier with his knobby fists than with his tongue, "I mean——"

"Yeah, I know. He is a bum, a big, dirty tramp; half-nutty I think, too. But it's up to the chief engineer to handle Sampson. He's no affair o' mine so long as he stays out o' my way an' keeps up steam."

"That's right," agreed the mate, anxious to redeem himself.

"Pass the salmon," said the captain.

The good ship *Paoli*, out of Newport News to Barcelona, loaded with West Virginia coal, was steaming along at her usual ten knots in a fair and utterly placid sea. The night, warm yet refreshing with its clear salt tang, surrounded them. The ocean was as flat and black as a bitulithic pavement, and every minute star in the firmament glittered like a sliver of tinsel. There was no sound there in the mess-room save the throb-throb of the engines, and, now and then, from the galley aft, the rise and swell of negro voices in drifting bits of soft, barbaric melody.

"For he was her man; an' he done her wrong."

Captain Bartlett Gustafson, the mate, and Parke, the third officer, were having a bite of supper stewed up by the mess-boy. Selden, the second officer, was on watch above.

The three officers, there around the red-clothed table, were serenely comfortable. Now that the depression in shipping was practically over, and commerce again had begun to flow with the trade winds, it was good to be once more at sea. Less able officers, upstarts of the mad war days, when any able seaman might easily get a ticket, were at home, idle on the beach. But these three men: Bartlett, Gustafson and Parke were real seafaring men; the master and the mate old-timers in sail and steam; Parke and his friend the second mate, Selden, ex-naval reserve men who at the urge of the ancestral New England blood had been won away from the turmoil of the land by the call of the open deep. The good old days were coming back, they felt.

Generally at this hour the chief and sometimes the second assistant came forward for a game of cribbage and a night-cap; but the chief, Fitzhenry, was working on a cranky water-gauge tonight and had 'phoned that he would not be forwarded until late. The first assistant was not popular with the deck officers.

For that there was a reason.

In the first place Sampson, as he called himself, though there was doubt as to his legal or native right to that name, was a huge, dark-browed fellow, sullen and evil-tempered. The fire-room crew hated him heartily and feared him even more; the sailors avoided him. It was Sampson's first trip with the *Paoli*, and he had come aboard at the last moment as substitute for the regular first-assistant who was ill with appendicitis in a Norfolk hospital.

Sampson was a good engineer; even Fitzhenry, whose natural preference for his own Scotsmen lent him prejudice, admitted that. His references were the best: during the war it was said that as chief on a coal vessel he had stayed below when a bursting boiler had killed all of the firemen on watch, crippled his ship, and threatened to lose her place with the scurrying convoy. No, there was nothing against Sampson except himself. Instinctively men didn't like him; that was all.

Partly it was his appearance and partly his manner. Truculent as all engineer officers must be to handle the scum of the world that sifts into a fire-room, Sampson's truculence extended even to his off-duty manner. He accepted and executed orders as if he had been grossly insulted by his superiors; and his manner to the men under his command was an eternal threat. But, as he executed the orders, and did his work well there was no tangible cause for complaint. His moodiness, which at times approached unconsciousness of all that happened about him, requiring often the frequent repetition of a command to attract his attention, was laid to his eternal sullenness. In appearance he lived up to his apparent character; a huge, big-thewed man, well over six feet, with abnormally long arms that, on account of his bowed shoulders, hung straight down before him when he sidled up from the depths of the engine-room for an infrequent airing on the after-deck. Oddly enough these arms and the chest of his mightily muscled torso were practically clean of hair.

Gustafson, hungry after his watch, was consuming his fourth big cup of coffee. A big, blond Scandanavian he was ever good-natured and never so happy as when eating.

"Good cook, we've got this trip," he remarked, licking his lips.

"Yeah," grunted the captain, "real cook—American and black. None o' your West Indians for me. And he launched out into one of his long stories of cruises in the Caribbean.

Through the lee porthole, open on the bay of deck, came never a sound. So steady was the passage of the vessel through the quiet waters that not even the *lap-lap* of the waves as they curled past the bow could make itself heard. A fair, still wind and a following sea gave the good *Paoli* as easy a run as her ship's life had ever known. It was an ideal night on the ocean.

The captain's voice ran on steadily and monotonously. Full-fed and comfortable after canned-salmon, fried potatoes and coffee, his hearers were drowsy. A slight quiver shook the vessel.

"Racin'?" questioned the mate, curiously, referring to the action of the screw. "Not enough sea for that."

But the second's hesitation, as if, for an instant, the heart of the ship had stopped, skipping a beat or two, was so brief that no one else paid any attention. But, aft, the singing had ceased, and all was silent. The steamer *Paoli* slid on through an empty, open sea.

"An' as we put out to the vessel," droned the captain: "ready to get away with the ebb, those black Hy-tians— Hullo, what's this?"

On the center of the table-cloth, just under the captain's nose, a small object, some three inches long, had fallen; tossed in through the open porthole.

"——'s hatches!" swore Gustafson, frozen stiff.

"Gawd save us!"

Gasping, the captain jumped to his feet; eyes staring, hands spread and drawn away in horror.

The object on the table was a human thumb. The bloody thumb of a white man.

THERE was, for an instant, no coherent word spoken. But all three men were on their feet, gaping in shocked astonishment.

Then instinctively all turned toward the porthole. But the smooth black circle was empty. The captain, first to move, dashed for the doorway; but outside the deck bay was empty too. Aft and below the well deck, with its hatch-covers down, ran open and undisturbed to the galley and engine-room quarters astern. The ship, steady and serene, moved on under the stars.

Grim, his face drawn into granite lines, the captain leaped for the companion-ladder and ducked into his cabin. More slowly Gustafson and Parke followed him.

Just above the captain's quarters, on the second deck above the officers' mess-room was the pilot-house and chart-room. "See if Selden's all right, Mister Parke," snapped the master.

Parke was up the second ladder like a monkey.

But above it was as quiet as it had been only a moment before in the messroom. In the dim light of the pilot-house the seaman at the wheel stood erect, only his forearms twisting and bending as he swung the wheel slightly back and forth to hold the vessel true on her course. Selden, on the bridge outside, gazed out straight along the line of the dark bowsprit. He turned negligently at the sound of Parke's feet. Just then the man at the wheel struck six bells—*ding-ding—ding-ding—ding-ding!*

From the forepeak the man on watch answered.

"What's up?" said Selden calmly.

Parke told him.

Before Selden could say a word the captain appeared.

"Stay at your post, Mister Selden," he ordered. "And you stay here too, Parke. Mister Gustafson, you come with me. Got your gun?"

The captain carried his in his right hand: in his left were a pair of handcuffs.

Gustafson patted his hip pocket. "All ready, sir."

"Can't I come too?" Selden and Parke spoke at once, eagerly.

"Do as you're told. I'll handle this."

"Yes, sir," agreed Parke, obediently.

But Selden, more hot-spirited, interjected—

"But, sir——"

"Do as you're told, Mister Selden,——it!"

The second mate subsided. Inside the pilot-house the man at the wheel, steady old seaman that he was, merely twisted his spokes, and spat a stream of tobacco to the spittoon at his feet. Though he had heard the story, old Higginson had been too long at his trade to get excited by so small a thing as a human thumb. Grim Death is a sister to the Sea. Silently, his head hunched down between his shoulders, his jaw thrust forward, the captain stumped out to the deck. Gustafson followed.

Together, silent shapes gliding through the gloom, they slipped down the three companion-ladders to the level of the deck; then aft along the bulwarks. Together, so close as to be almost one figure, they climbed the after companionway. Aft there was no light visible save the dusty radiance that streamed from the open doorway on the port quarter. There was the cook's galley and the crew's mess. Opposite, on the starboard sides the engineer officers had their quarters and private mess-room. The captain and the mate, until now but murky shapes, came out into the gleam of the galley's open door. And, on the instant, with vivid yellow flashes, two shots smashed out in the darkness.

One figure fell: the smaller.

The big man, Gustafson, plunged straight into the galley's glow, his gun spouting fire as he jumped. A veritable volley of shots roared thunderously through the night's quiet.

Ignoring his orders, Selden flung himself down the ladders and dashed headlong across the well-deck, not pausing even to duck into his stateroom to get his revolver. Parke followed at his heels.

But before they had gone halfway across the deck a throng of dark bodies came rolling and tumbling out of the galley door. Gustafson, they could see, was yet on his feet, though three or four staggering figures clung to his waist and shoulders. But as the crowd of writhing and fighting men lurched battling across the deck and toppled toward the head of the companionway, a flash of fire jumped out into the night. And the mate, with three men still hanging to him, pitched straight down the narrow steps, falling a good ten feet to the iron deck below. There they rolled, mad and screaming, a dull mass of wild arms and legs.

Selden, feet flying, jumped into the mêlée. For an instant he saw the mate's white face, jowl to jowl with a black head. Deftly, and with all the force of his powerful leg, the second mate kicked at the black head. He realized then that all three of the mate's assailants were negroes. The old race antagonism, so innate in the white man, flamed up inside him; and Selden kicked viciously at every dark, almost naked black body. But it was young Parke who managed at last to get hold of Gustafson's arm, and for an instant drag him free.

But the blacks were again up and upon them. Gustafson's gun, dropped in the scrimmage, was sliding and bumping about under the six men's feet. To bend to reach for it was to be overwhelmed by the others; and Selden and Parke had to do their uttermost to remain upright and on the defensive. The mate, his head all bloody, could scarcely, it was evident, totter. Certainly he had been hard hurt.

Then, purely by chance, young Parke's hand fell on a monkey-wrench, carelessly dropped on one of the hatch-covers. Swinging it with all his might he felled one of the negroes; and with almost the same motion drove the wrench's knobbed end into the wide open mouth of another. The latter staggered back, spitting teeth and blood; but in an instant came on again. Selden, who had been tripped by a coil of rope, was flat on his back; a black head butting into his face, black hands at his throat throttling. The mate, his strength gone, had collapsed over a hatch. And above now, on the higher after deck, more men were crowding to the fight.

These, it could be discerned even in that dim light, were mostly colored men. A black mutiny!

No one, berthed there in the quiet Virginia port whence they had sailed, would ever have contemplated such a contingency; and it was not surprizing that the master of the *Pauli*, accustomed as he was to the mongrel crews of the seven seas, should not have hesitated to sign on negroes as cooks and firemen. He had used them a hundred times before in a hundred voyages.

Negroes as cooks and firemen were generally to be trusted, rather indeed to be preferred to the run of seafaring white men who would tolerate the hell of fire-room labor; and they were infinitely stronger and more hardy than the lascars and coolies of the British merchant service. They were irresponsible, of course, but usually good-natured, husky and willing. Captain Bartlett then had not even dreamed of trouble when he signed his three black cooks and his half-dozen colored firemen. He knew the race well, liked them, and in all his experience had had no cause to doubt them.

What had happened now, though? To Parke, a slight youngster, grappling desperately with the one negro whose teeth he had crushed, the answer came almost immediately. For there, foremost among the gang of negroes crowding the top of the companion-ladder above him, bulked the big form of Sampson, the first-assistant engineer. The dull gleam in the engineer's hand evidenced the fact that he was armed.

The thing, in a flash, was clear. Somehow, for some sinster purpose, Sampson had stirred up this broth; and was now in unquestioned command. All this Parke perceived and knew without a second's hesitation. Indeed, in the hard plight in which he was, with the crazy negro tearing into him with head, fists and feet, he had no space to think. He was trying only to stave off, if but for a moment, the fierce charge of his attacker so that he might get to the prostrate Selden, who lay now, almost gone, under the frenzied assaults of the other black men.

But it was just at this moment of Parke's realization that Jack Selden's hand accidentally came in contact with the loose revolver that Gustafson had dropped. Pinned down as he was the second mate managed to twist himself over far enough to fire. The heavy, heaving body above him went limp. The man shrieked horribly. Selden scrambled up just in time to shoot again; and dazed though he was his shot must have nicked Parke's opponent in the shoulder muscles; for that negro's right arm dropped limp. For a second, freed from the desperate rough-and-tumble death-battle, the two officers stood clear. Then, from directly above, Sampson fired.

Close as he was, however, the big first-assistant did not reckon on the angle, aiming too low. The ball, carroming off the iron plates, ricocheted forward screaming. And, before Sampson could fire again, Selden and Parke, grabbing the inert body of Gustafson between them, were stumbling forward in retreat toward the pilot-house.

As if to follow them Sampson leaped down the companion-ladder; but there, turning to exhort the rest of his gang to the chase, he lost a precious instant. When, his disordered gang behind him, he turned again to follow, the two mates and their helpless burden were halfway to the forward companion-ladders, and Selden's voice came clear and commanding:

"Back up, you dogs! You dirty, black —— divers! I've got you all covered."

Instinctively the treacherous engineer crouched; while his followers behind and above flattened themselves on the flooring. Unmolested, therefore, Selden and Parke got their fellow officer to the forward ladders, yanked him up to the level of the captain's cabin just below the bridge, and there halted.

Throughout all of this scrimmage there had been hardly a sound save for the thumping and pounding of men's feet on the iron plates and a yelp or two of anguished pain. After the first volley that had greeted the captain's advance upon the galley only half a dozen shots had been exchanged; and during the whole row the *Paoli* had steamed along straight and true upon her course. Old Higginson, at the wheel, had seen to that. Mutinies were but unamiable incidents in his weather-tanned, salt-soaked life.

That the engine-room crew was also under control was probable, since not for a moment had the vessel lost headway. There had been indeed that mere breath, when, but such a very few moments before, as captain and officers sat at the mess-table, the engines seemed to throttle down. That had been just before the gruesome talisman of death and disaster came skipping in through the cabin porthole and on to the red cloth of the table.

Now, at the top of the companion-ladder, crouched low and waiting further developments, Selden began to understand something, or at least to hazard a guess at something, of what had happened. Sampson, evidently the leader, had, for some obscure reason of his own, stirred up a mutiny. To do that he had had, of course, to overpower the chief engineer. Fitzhenry, dour Scotchman that he was, had in his soul the quick fighting flame inherited from the Limerick grandfather who had given him his name. He would not have fallen without fight unless taken by treachery. Was it his—old Fitzhenry's—thumb that lay back there on the red cloth of the table in the cabin? Grisly thought that it was there seemed no other answer; for almost obscured by the clotting blood, as it had been, the tiny wart at the base of the nail of the thumb was unmistakable. Fitzhenry's it was. No doubt.

And Captain Bartlett, overwhelmed by

that horde from the galley, had he gone the way of the chief?

As for Gustafson, the mate, he still breathed; but stentorously, and as if each breath would bring the end. His head was cruelly crushed above the right temple; and there was another hole close to the base of the neck from which slow, crimson blood still welled out sluggishly.

AFTER the first relief at reaching comparative safety Selden and Parke quickly realized how difficult and ominous was their position. Quickly arming themselves they waited for further attack by Sampson's gang. They anticipated that he would push his early advantage.

But this the treacherous engineer seemed in no mood to attempt. He knew, undoubtedly, it may be presumed, that he should be obliged to lead any such attack himself; and, sly as he might be at stealthy murder he had no enthusiastic ambition to put himself at such a distinct disadvantage as would be necessary to gain the tops of the companion-ladders. So, for a time, he and his blacks hung off, scuttling about over the after superstructure, or venturing only a little way forward along the well-deck. Sampson's big bulk could be clearly seen encouraging them all; but at that distance there was little chance for an effective pistol shot. Selden, wedded to his old army weapon, cursed the shortsightedness that had deprived him of revolvers, far the more accurate piece at any range over thirty or forty yards. Finding, though, that the master's lockers were fairly well stocked with .45 bullets the second mate whistled a shot down aft every few minutes just to let the mutineers know that the fight was less than half-won.

The position, though, of the two young officers was indeed precarious. Forward, on the deck below and on either side of the mess-room, were the cabins of the officers, and, to port the bunks of the boatswain, the steward and of four able seamen. Back of the mess-room were the stores for the daily use of the steward; but practically all of the substantial food was aft in the cook's galley. If there were to be a siege—and a siege, Selden, now in command, had determined that there should be—it was imperative that such stores of food as were available should be safely put away instantly, together with an adequate supply of water.

Promptly then he set the boatswain and two of the sailors to work, lugging stores from the steward's pantry up above to the bridge, being careful to place the water-casks forward of the pilot house so that none of Sampson's bullets might find them and drain them dry. Besides the boatswain and the two seamen, Becker and Strupp, there was the man who had been on the forepeak, Jim Sadler, and the other old-timer, Higginson. The steward, whether by accident or not, had been aft at the time of the outbreak and was not to be found. Nor, in anticipation, was there any hope of help from the wireless, for the operator's instrument and quarters were aft; and "sparks" himself certainly a captive, if not dead.

Working swiftly, and in the darkness, for Selden purposed to have no lights to serve for targets, the four men transferred all the stores from the steward's closet to the chart-house behind the wheel. Higginson remained steadily at his post, holding serenely to his course, laid east half north. Selden and Parke, after what rough attention they could give to the first mate's wounds, had left him stretched out motionless on the settee of the chart-room and had returned to their respective stations at the port and starboard companion ladders. Each had three pistols, one in either hand, and one easy of reach before them as they lay there flat on their bellies. But their apprehension of attack was unfulfilled.

Aft, the crowd still dominated by the bulk of Sampson's body, was becoming noisy. The first cook, as the officers knew, had the trick of brewing some kind of violent liquor from potato peelings, and this beverage doubtless the unloosed firemen had discovered. Frequent pistol shots banged and echoed, but from the direction of the flashes that were seen, and failure to distinguish the whine of bullets overhead, the officers knew that the shots were being discharged merely into the air in a sort of Fourth of July abandonment, and that no serious damage was intended. All lights aft, moreover, had been switched on; and in the glow of illumination a night of revelry promised.

Eight bells sounded clear from the wheel-house. Higginson was still on the job. It had been only an hour since the vessel was a disciplined, orderly ship: now——

An hour more passed; and the stores, such as they were, had been safely disposed of. But it was an ill-assorted diet that was provided. Meat, save for a single cold-boiled ham, there was none; no potatoes nor flour. Plenty of sugar and salt and tea and coffee there was, to be sure, and a few dozen tins of canned-meats and vegetables; such things as needed no cooking and could be served easily by the steward and his boys. But on that diet the seven beleagured able men, and the terribly wounded Gustafson, were to be obliged to live if they were to live at all. For a few days, on a careful dole of rations, it would be enough. After that—well, there might be none left of the seven after that. Time to worry later. Meanwhile Selden and Parke kept guard.

By one o'clock, when Higginson mechanically sounded his two bells, the noise aft had, temporarily at least, subsided. The cook's potato liquor must have been more noxiously potent than usual; for all about the after decks sleeping bodies could be seen; though two or three constantly prowling shapes warned the sharply watching officers that not all the mutineers had succumbed to the lure of the drink. Nevertheless, it seemed to Selden expedient to do now, and quickly, whatever he could to reinforce their position.

So, with two of the men, Becker and Strupp, he descended to cut the life-boats from their davits, in order that some sort of material might be supplied for the improvising of crude barricades. Then, too, the water-casks and packages of biscuits with which the boats were well stocked would prove a priceless supplement to the iron ration they already possessed. Particularly were the biscuits necessary as addition to the one-sided diet. There was enough of mutiny abroad tonight; starvation would not help matters in his own command. So, hurrying their work, and never quite sure when a renewed fusillade would break out from the after quarter, the seamen hastily stored the added provisions, and ran back to the boats.

The falls gave quickly to the hacking knives; and the boats, dragged to the foot of the companion-ladders, were quickly smashed up into five-foot lengths sufficient for a sort of rough barring of the companionways. These short lengths, nailed crosswise over the treads of the steps, with here and there a pointed stake sticking upward, would prevent the assailants from storming them too easily, slow up, a little at least, the first maniacal wave of attack. What planks remained were nailed to the railings on the after side of the deck outside the captain's cabin, rather to serve as a mask for the movements of the defenders—for the boards were but thin and would be easily punctured—than for any real protection against bullets. By early dawn, however, the superstructure of the forward part of the vessel had been turned into a rude fortress; and the seven white men were ready for any eventuality.

But their position was a strange one. Controlling, as they did, the forward part of the ship, all means of steering the vessel was in their control. But the engines, all the motive power, and all the fuel of the *Paoli* was aft, under absolute direction of the blood-thirsty first-assistant. They could guide the ship. But he alone could make it move.

What would he do? Throttle down, shut her off, and let her drift? And so ultimately starve them into surrender? That certainly was within his power. And how long would his choleric patience endure?

If they could only get to their radio! Both Selden and Parke knew enough to handle the instrument. But what use would be an attempt after all? So clever a man as Sampson would certainly have put that out of commission first of all.

Selden, checking over the crew list, estimated that they were probably outnumbered at least three to one. Oilers, water-tenders and firemen were unanimously under Sampson's control, the three cooks were certainly on his side; two Peruvian or Mexican seamen were missing, as was an ordinary seaman, a rat-faced youth from New York's east side, who had been shipped on for want of better choice. Well armed as the officers were any attack upon that howling, crazy mob astern was out of the question.

The night passed slowly for those men there, penned in on the forward half of the ship. The sudden transition from the calmness of well-ordered navigation to the chaos of mutiny was so shocking as, for the time at least, to be impossible of realization. And Selden and Parke were not quite able to comprehend in an instant the whole truth that, as abruptly as a hissing meteor plunges from sky to sea, so suddenly had their captain been murdered and their ship snatched from their control. They could only hope that the chief engineer was dead. For it had been the thumb of the chief engineer—little doubt of that, for the wart at the base of the nail was distinguishing—which had been flipped in through the port of the mess-room. Dawn came with no change. The sun loomed up like a big, orange bulb, bulging flamboyantly out of the sea as though squeezed from a vortex of waters. The ocean, gilded by oblique panels of radiance, lay utterly flat; so still that the hull of the *Paoli* was mirrored as in a pond.

Aft, in the sun's clean morning gleam, the sleeping bodies of the drunken fire-room crew lay sprawled about the deck; but that there were still enough of them conscious to carry on the work was evident from the fact that the vessel continued to surge onward, her white, creamy wake rolling out behind her as straight as a clean-blazed trail. Old Higginson, sturdy old dog that he was, had accepted but one two-hour relief in all this time; for the rest standing immobile at the spokes of his wheel, only his wrists moving gently now and then as he swung a point or so to port or starboard. It was his adept steering that drew their trail so true. How much longer would he have control!

Full day came, hot and overcast; but it was almost mid-morning, the sun tipped over the yardarm, before the big figure of Sampson appeared, lurching round the after superstructure. Carelessly, brutally, he kicked each one of the prostrated firemen into consciousness, till finally all of them had been awakened and driven below. Calmly, without surprise or dismay, he surveyed the barricaded pilot-house, the tangle of splintered boards that blocked ascent, the fortified captain's cabin where the young officers held their post. Selden, just to let him know that there was no intention of surrender, sent over one shot which splintered the bulwark just beneath the engineer's hand, and made him hop nimbly to cover.

"Good boy," laughed Parke, who had just waked from a short nap. "That's the stuff to give the —— pirate. We're not ready to lie down and have our thumbs cut off yet. Hope poor old Fitz is dead. How's Gustafson?"

The wounded mate, terribly hurt, had tossed and groaned all night; but now with the coming of morning, his head bathed by frequent cold compresses, he was resting quietly, grunting a trifle in his sleep but with breath coming more regularly. So far they had not been able to get from him any coherent word, nor to find out if the captain were really dead

Toward noon, however, while Selden and Parke, sextants aloft, warily took their shots at the sun to check up on their position, Gustafson on his settee in the chart-room quietly opened his eyes.

"Where's—where's the master?" was his first dazed question.

"Aft," answered Selden shortly, bending over the chart-drawers, picking out his position.

"Oh!" Gustafson seemed to remember. "Oh—dead," he said.

Then, succumbing again, he lost consciousness. But his memory evidently had not tricked him; for just after the eight bells of noon a big bulk wrapped in an American flag, was lugged from the galley door, and, as Sampson stood by watching, was dumped into the sea. The engineer's head, oddly enough, was bared. The negroes too, superstitious in the face of death, had also removed their caps.

"Both of them, do you suppose?" said Parke quietly; "the master and the chief?"

"I guess so," was all Selden could answer. "God help that —— Sampson!"

"He'd be an easy target now. We could probably hit him."

"Not while he's burying the master," replied Selden.

The day, long and empty, passed slowly. Aft there was no sign of disturbance; every one apparently was busy recovering from the night's excesses. Forward, with the boatswain O'Hare relieving Higginson, the vessel was held on her steady course; and never for an instant did the revolutions of the screw check in their steady rotation. Sampson, for whatever reason he chose, was keeping the fires up.

Once, toward sundown, they raised a sailing-ship far off on the starboard quarter; she was hull down on the horizon and there was no hope of catching her attention with a signal. A display of the distress flag, the ensign upside down, would, Selden knew, bring an immediate assault from Sampson's horde. And Sampson could easily checkmate any change of course in that direction by merely shutting off his engines. So night came, and with it a redoubled vigilance on the part of the young officers forward.

That Sampson wished no repetition of last night's orgy was quickly gathered from the fact that no shouting or discharging of firearms came from the after quarter. Tonight everything was still and orderly. Under the wan sickle of a crescent moon the mutineers, dark forms almost invisible, assembled passively about the galley doors, and the weird chant of the old negro melodies came drifting forward through the warm and lifeless air.

The doom of the funeral was still upon those impressionable minds, and in their present subdued state Selden anticipated little trouble for the moment. That the villainous Sampson with one or two of the sturdier souls might, indeed, start a foray was conceivable; but any general rush was not to be feared. Selden and Parke took two-hour watches, therefore, with Higginson, quartermaster, and O'Hare, boatswain, alternating at the wheel; and Becker and Strupp, the seamen, watching from the port side.

Endlessly the chants of the negroes drifted down to them through the quiet night. The drift of the plaintive tune of the old spiritual, the almost devout words, were in odd contrast to the spirit of the murderers who chanted them:

"Oh, Mary don't you weep
Oh, Mary don't you moan
The grace o' God's goin' to carry us home;
Pharoah's army done drownded—
Oh, Mary don't weep.

Mary weeped an' Martha cried
'Cause the Lord was crucified;
Pharoah's army done drownded—
Oh, Mary don't weep.

Who's all these come dressed in white
Mus' be the chillun o' the Israelite;
Pharoah's army done drownded—
Oh, Mary don't weep."

But the verse had just broken off in the long, quavering wail of the last line when a shot broke from the port station, where Becker was keeping guard.

"Up, —— you, I've got you spotted. I'll come down there with a belayin' pin, you dirty traitor!"

Selden swung round the cabin to find the seaman Becker all ready to slide down over the barricades, his pistol pointing to the dark corner of a forward hatch.

"What is it?" demanded the second mate. "What did you see, Becker?"

"A dirty skulker, Mister Selden," answered the A. B. "Tried to sneak up on me, he did, keepin' himself hid along the hatches. He's down behind that hatch cover now, flat on his black belly he is, sir. An' scared white, I'm guessin'."

"Come up," ordered Selden sharply, "we won't shoot. Come up, do you hear. And no tricks. Show yourself, and keep your hands over your head."

"Yuh won't shoot?" was the reply.

And it was not a negro voice.

"No, we won't shoot unless you make us."

"I'm comin'."

From the protecting corner of the hatch-cover a dark shape magically materialized and came haltingly forward.

"Climb up," commanded Selden, keeping the man covered. "Why," he added in astonishment, "it's Passmore, the donkey-man."

"—— and toe-nails!" gulped the amazed Becker.

"Yes, it's me, Mister Selden," admitted Passmore, deck-engineer who controlled the donkey-engine for lifting hatches and handling the cargo booms.

He scrambled as briskly as possible over the interlaced braces and stakes until he had reached the top of the companion-ladder.

"It's me; an' —— glad to be back with white men again."

"What were ye doin' with that murderin' gang aft, then?" inquired Becker contemptuously.

"Faith, I couldn't help it," said Passmore.

"Come inside," ordered Selden, "and tell us what happened."

Within, in the chart-room, Selden waked Parke, and together they heard the donkey-man's story. The fellow, scared to death and still trembling, told it straightaway and without any hesitation.

"From the hour we left port," he said, "I mistrusted that somethin' was dead wrong aft there. The stokers done what the chief told 'em all right enough; an' that —— Sampson was pretty quiet; but there was too much talkin', whisperin', you understand; here a little crowd an' there a little crowd, all with their —— black heads down together. It give me the creeps, it did. An' worst of all they wasn't talkin' English most of the time—not as I could understand what they was sayin' anyway."

"Not English? Why, they're all American darkies—except three or four 'spicks'—South Americans or Mexicans."

"Well," admitted Passmore; "mebbe it was English; but it didn't sound like it."

"Dialect," suggested Parke, "they talk a weird tongue down there along the rice coast of the Carolinas. That's where most of those boys come from. You can hardly understand them."

"Mebbe that was it"; agreed the donkeyman, "anyways I didn't like the look of it a little bit. An' twicet I seen the first-assistant talkin' confidential with his crew. That didn't look right to me neither."

"Could you hear what he said; or they said to him?"

"I could hear some words; but I couldn't understand 'em, Mister Selden."

"What? Not understand what the first-assistant was saying? He wasn't talking dialect too, was he?"

"Indeed he was, sir. Just the same lingo those other niggers talked."

"Other niggers!"

The casual phrase was a bombshell. Did Passmore mean to imply that Sampson——

"By George!" exploded Parke. "Do you suppose that Sampson is a negro himself? I never thought of that, but——"

"He might be, at that," mused Selden, suddenly thoughtful.

The man did have certain negroid characteristics, now that one came to think of it; and Selden had been too often in Charleston, New Orleans and Galveston not to know how nearly the quadroon or octoroon may approach the appearance of the true white man.

"Sure, he's a nigger," put in the still trembling Passmore. "I didn't guess it at first. But las' night they was all boastin' about it back there."

"He'd admitted it?"

"Looked that way, sir."

"Perhaps——"

But: "Listen!" interrupted Parke.

Again the refrain of the melody of the ancient spiritual drifted up to them:

"Who's all these come dressed in blue
Mus' be the chillun that just come thru;
Pharoah's army done drownded—
Oh, Mary don't weep.

Who's all these come dressed in red
Mus' be the chillun what Moses led;
Pharoah's army done drownded—
Oh, Mary don't weep.

Who's all these come dressed in black
Mus' be the chillun that was turned back;
Pharoah's army done drownded—
Oh, Mary don't weep.

Down by the waterside I been led
My soul been fed with heavenly bread;
Pharoah's army done drownded—
Oh, Mary don't weep."

And above, soaring above the wailing refrain, ran a high, rich tenor voice.

"That's him," breathed Passmore, "him, singin' so loud and clear."

Amazed, suddenly aware of the situation that was to be met, Selden and Parke stared at each other. That Sampson was himself a negro, and that it was to this fact that he owed his mastery over the other blacks was a startling and yet luminously explanatory fact, no doubt. And, now that they harked back, it was to be recalled that it had been Sampson as first-assistant engineer who had been responsible for selecting and signing on almost all the members of the fire-room crew. Gradually the inference became plainer. There are today, north of the District of Columbia, so many colored men and women who have successfully 'gone white.' That was probably Sampson's case. Dropping all his blood connections in his native South, cutting himself off from his own race in America, Sampson the mulatto had managed to do just what others of his people have done, had managed for a space to lose himself in some odd corner of the world, probably in the swarthy Latin countries; and there, by application and diligence, succeeded in securing an assistant-engineer's ticket.

Then, returning to his native land, mixing exclusively with white men, many actually darker of skin than himself, and trading upon his engineer's ticket to avoid suspicion, he had eventually established himself unquestionably as a white man. The thing was not difficult to fathom. Though what the connection could be, the inspiration for this murderous revolt, remained yet a mystery. Passmore's eager narrative, resumed, was easily interpreted in the thoughts of the two young officers.

"So when the big row come in the galley, the night before last," went on Passmore, "I done what I could to help."

"How did the thing start?"

Selden wanted to hear the whole of the tale as it had happened, so that he might be able as accurately as possible to diagnose the situation.

"I dunno," replied Passmore; "but some sort o' fight got started in the galley. One o' the spicks it was, some say, who called the big cook—you know what. An' the cook, the big black fellow, you know, that stands up so straight an' seems so gosh-awful proud o' himself; he up an' hit the spick with a cleaver. Took a bit o' the greaser's ear off, it did. The spick pulled a knife; an' then in come the chief."

"Yes?"

"I got there about that time, too. As I come in I passed Sampson an' two o' them black firemen, all standin' by the auxiliary wheel aft an' talkin' low. One of 'em said, I heard as I run past; 'There's a fight now. Ain't it time to turn loose?' "

"What did Sampson say to that?"

"I dunno. I thought nothin' of it at the time. There was too much —— loose in the galley. I just went on in."

"They were still fighting when you got there?"

"No. The fight was all over. At least it looked that way."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Two o' the boys was holdin' the spick, him screamin' and crazy mad, but with the blood runnin' down the side o' his face like a bleedin' waterfall. An' the chief had knocked the cook cold, cleaver an' all. There didn't seem like anythin' more was doin'."

"And then what?" Parke broke in.

"Ugh!"

The donkey-man cringed in the disgust of the memory.

"Ugh! Then Sampson walked in. The chief had his back to 'im. An' that black-livered son o' —— walked right up behind the old man as quiet as a cat on a fence. Another big cleaver, all smeared up with meat, lay there on the galley table. An'——"

Passmore hesitated, shivering again.

"And what?" was the impatient inquery.

"And," said Passmore, "agh, just as calm as you please that Sampson picked up the cleaver, swung it over his head; and split the chief's head like a biscuit."

"Good ——! Without any warning? While the chief wasn't looking?"

"Just as I'm tellin' you, Mister Selden, s'help me Gawd!"

"He never knew it?" asked Parke.

"Not a thing. Went down like a ox."

There was a moment's silence. The cold-bloodedness of the crime balked imagination. But Selden, even in his horror, quickly resumed and pressed on with his questioning.

"Did no one do anything?"

"Do?" answered Passmore, "with that big —— standin' there with the cleaver in his hand? All bloody the thing was too, an' white in spots; white with the old man's brains!"

The young officers, shocked at the picture so graphically drawn, looked at each other in silence. But Passmore, a realist without imagination, went on more calmly now.

"After a minute the first-assistant wiped off the cleaver on an old apron o' the cook's, looked around, made a motion to three of his men, and told the rest of us to stay where we were."

"You stayed?"

"You bet I did."

"Well," after a pause, "and then?"

"I say I stayed, sir; so what happened after that I don't know savin' from what I heard later. Seems that the first-assistant went below; caught the second and third in their cabins an' tied 'em up. The second give some fight and shut off the engines, dodgin' below when he seen the murderin' look on the first-assistant's face. You remember, mebbe, that the vessel choked off for a minute."

"Yes, I recall it," agreed Selden.

"Well, Sampson knocked the second in the head. Didn't kill 'im though. I took him his breakfast this mornin'. Had to feed 'im, for the first-assistant had got 'im tied to his bunk like a pig. They're down there still, the two assistants. But —— help 'em if those niggers get drunk again. They'll be wantin' to drink white men's blood, I'm thinkin'. After their cuttin' off the chief's thumb——"

"Sampson did that?"

"He did, sir. An' then he sent the big, black cook—him they call 'Duke'—sent him forward to throw the thing in your port-hole."

There, in the end, was the story. The rest the junior officers knew for themselves. Only one more question was necessary.

"The—the—master—is dead?" Selden asked.

"Shot with Sampson's first bullet," said Passmore. "Dead and buried; him and the chief together, in the same shroud. God rest their brave souls!"

* * *

THE puzzle as to what Sampson intended doing with the ship now that he had seized it had, since the mutiny, been uppermost in the minds of Selden and Parke. Seize the ship he had; and murdered the captain and chief engineer; but to what end? So far he had control only of the motive power of the vessel. He could drive it; but he could drive it only where the man at the wheel directed it should go.

But what was the crazy half-breed's plan? On this point the trembling deck-engineer who had controlled the donkey-engine could give no information. He had learned nothing of the mutineer's plans.

Early in the day Selden had contemplated altering their course from the direct line to the Straits of Gibraltar to a direction that would bring them up at the Azores, only two or three days away. But more mature deliberation had convinced him that there was no merit and even less safety in this idea. Sight of land, suggestion of capture and condign retribution—and death could be the only penalty for mutiny and murder—would undoubtedly whip the blacks into a frenzy and would precipitate a desperate attack upon the pilot-house. Thoroughly at a loss, then, Selden directed the quarter-masters to hold to their course.

Midnight came and passed, the crescent moon still riding high above them. Aft there were occasional outbursts of noise that suggested that more of the cook's inflammable brew had been tapped by a few of the stokers. At two bells, drowsy and utterly wearied, Selden caught himself nodding at his post where he had relieved Parke. The seaman Becker kept vigil with him. Forward of the pilot-house the rest slept.

So the attack came almost as a surprize.

A creaking board, five feet from Selden's face, was the first warning. Just below him a dark figure, stripped to the belt, worked its way up over the barricade like an agile tom-cat. Below were half a dozen more clambering shapes.

Selden, starting to realization, fired wildly; and his shot brought Becker also to consciousness. So excited were they that the spatter of bullets all about them was scarcely noticed; for these shots came not directly from the attackers but from the distance of the after deck where Sampson had evidently planted a squad of pistol men to put down a sort of rude barrage while his more daring accomplices made a desperate endeavor to carry the stronghold of the wheel-house by storm.

Meanwhile, the first climbing figure had leaped upward, tripping and tumbling over the jagged *chevaux-de-frise* of crosswise timbers, but almost reaching Selden in his wild charge. In his hand was no gun, but a lightning-gleaming razor. The vicious steel flashed in a semi-circle just beneath the mate's chin.

Instinctively Selden's right arm rose to ward off the blow. It was the same instinctive action which prompts the inexperienced boxer to ward a swing from his face and so uncover his more vital solar plexus. For the instant the mate was in no position to use his pistol, its barrel pointed to the sky. His forearm met the flailing wrist of the negro.

Then, as the whizzing razor was blocked in its arc of death Selden's pistol barrel cracked down with terrific force on the man's shaven head. The mutineer grunted once and swayed forward; his knees slowly folded under him as if on hinges, and he slumped to the ground. But the pistol, jarred loose from Selden's grasp, clattered to the deck plates and skidded overboard.

The respite was brief, though, for already three new attackers were scrambling over the body of the fallen negro.

Sampson was not among them. This Selden recognized at once. And the realization that the leader and dominant spirit of the whole horrible business was not eager to trust his own precious person to the perils of the charge filled Selden with a sudden, desperate courage. The game was not up; not by a —— sight!

There had been no time as yet—or it had been an action of seconds—for help from Parke and the other seamen; but even with one pistol gone Selden had still another one in his left hand, and another one close by his foot. Becker, threatened only by two raiders on the port side had already shot one, and the other had dropped back. But Becker, like Casabianca, doggedly faithful to his orders, stuck to the port companionway as he had been directed.

"Hold the port station!" Selden had ordered.

And hold it Becker would. That he was sorely needed on the other side of the ship never occured to Becker. He hadn't had orders.

The mutineers, it was evident, had determined to concentrate on the starboard side, which, being less thoroughly barricaded, was somewhat easier of access.

And now in the sudden rush which swept up with almost irresistible force Selden's weapons were of little avail. Pistols are all very well in theory—but, how Selden wished he had a bayonet and a handy, free-swinging rifle butt. They're the stuff at close range. One more shot crippled a second attacker; but three more were already crowding in, eyes white, mouths open; had already mounted the barricade almost together and fell in a heap on the kneeling second mate.

As they thumped down upon him, arms, feet, razors and knives whirling, Selden could see that reinforcements were rushing forward to their support from the after-deck. From what Sampson could have seen from his safe post on the after deck he must have concluded that the pilot-house had already succumbed to the attack.

But Jack Selden had not succumbed. Smothered for a moment by the sheer weight of human bodies he could get in no effective thrust; but as one negro's teeth closed agonizingly in his left ear the muzzle of Selden's pistol buried itself in the soft abdomen of the man directly on top of him.

The shot went home. A frightful howl told that the black had been riddled through the bowels. Warm blood streamed across the second mate's bare left arm. Heaving desperately, he bounced the fatally wounded black man off his chest, while his left arm wrapped itself closely about the shaven head of the man who had bitten his ear. Straining the bare poll close, Selden's thumb found the negro's eye-socket and began steadily, but with supreme strength, to gouge in and in and in.

All this had happened in an instant. Becker even had not yet had time to get round the wheel-house. Parke was stumblingly struggling to his feet in the wheel-house, the first of all the sleepers fully to regain consciousness. Jack Selden, with one assailant mortally shot and the other held in a safe and torturing grip, was nevertheless still stretched flat on his back; his pistol lost, his right arm pinned down by the body of the man whose eye he gouged. And still he was at the mercy of the third negro; one of the cooks, he instantly realized and armed with a meat-cleaver.

Even as he recognized his opponent, the man with the cleaver struck. He aimed at Selden's eyes. Pinned there by the weight of the wounded man above him, a weight that lay almost entirely upon his shoulders and neck, it seemed impossible that Selden could avoid the murderous downward stroke. The cleaver glittered in his eyes; thudded down with a thump. But, as it whirled, the second mate had managed to draw in his neck just an inch or two.

Shaving his head, nailing his loose hair to the planking, the cleaver missed its mortal mark and buried itself deep in the deck boards. Pinned down by his hair as he was Selden could feel the flat side of the cold steel quiver and sing against his naked scalp.

The negro, amazed at missing, hesitated an instant before he leaped to grind Selden's upturned face with his bootheel. But, even as he leaped, Parke, appearing in the wheel-house doorway, shot him dead.

The other negro, who squirmed prostrate across Selden's shoulders, unable longer to endure the pain in his tortured eye, fought loose and tumbled down across the barricade screaming in anguish. For an instant the attackers were turned back.

As for the reinforcements sent up by Sampson, they hesitated midway down the deck when they realized the discomfiture of their mates. This assault was not so easy as represented, certainly. In the dim moonlight, silvering calmly over the carnage of battle, they could see that two still forms of their own party lay on the wheel-house deck, one more on the barricade where Becker's shot had dropped it; and that, right in their midst now, was another black man, alive, but spinning and wheeling crazily as if blind, hands covering his face, and his voice howling over and over again:

"He done tore out my eye! He done tore out my eye!"

Up on deck the defenders had suffered not a single casualty. Jack Selden's head had a clean white patch on it as big as a saucer; but the blond hair so cleanly chopped off by the cleaver was the only loss. The scalp itself had not even been scratched. Harry Parke, after his first moment of solicitude, laughed outright at the bizarre appearance of his mate.

"You're a sketch, you are, Jack. Must have Indian blood in him, that coon. Trying to scalp you that way."

"Let's get rid of the —— crew," was Selden's less humorous comment, pointing to the little group of would-be assailants who still wavered on the deck amidships.

"They might get up their nerve again, though I doubt it. Let 'em have it!"

Together four guns fired; and two of the group fell. The rest, entirely discomfited, retreated helter-skelter, stepping all over each other in their panic.

Selden watched them calmly, though his hand automatically massaged the naked place on his scalp.

"Wish that swine Sampson would show his ugly face," he mourned. "But I guess we'll have quiet the rest of the night."

His prediction was true. Until dawn the *Paoli* might have been freighting a party of hard-sleeping Cook's tourists for all the noise that was made. The negro who had been shot through the bowels was obliging enough to die in half an hour, and so his corpse, together with the one Becker had killed, and the cleaver-wielder for whom Parke had so fortunately accounted, were heaved over the rail to the sharks without a tremor of sentiment or vestige of ceremony.

The only word said as the bodies plumped down into the water came from Boatswain O'Hare, who, turning from the wheel, muttered—

"Kindly omit flowers!"

And spat over the gunwale.

There was still another card to play, however.

The mutineers, balked in their attempts to take the forward half of the ship by storm, knew another trick. Sampson, for all his degenerate brutality, was a good engineer. He knew his ship. And he meant to control that ship; not only the motive power but the steering as well.

It was Higginson, relieving O'Hare at the wheel at eight bells of the morning watch, who brought the news of the new devilment.

"She don't answer her wheel, Mister Selden!" Higginson growled.

Selden saw, watching the vessel's wake, that this was true. Higginson, spinning his wheel steadily to the left, was exercising no control over the rudder; for the ship veered persistently to starboard. Try as he would the quartermaster couldn't jockey the *Paoli* back to her direct course.

The answer came almost at once. Had the deck officers been engineers they would have foreseen the simple expedient. Sampson had merely severed the electric wiring which connects the rudder with the wheel in the pilot-house. Now, the steering was being done from the auxiliary wheel aft.

"That's it!" groaned Selden, as, from his perch on top of the wheel-house he could discern a man, one of the Mexican water-tenders, he thought, at the auxiliary-wheel.

Parke, awakened, was acquainted with this new and unanticipated turn of affairs.

"Well, now we are up against it," was his only comment. "Can take us wherever he likes. On to a reef, probably."

"Not so sure about that," mused Selden, suddenly thoughtful. "I——"

Quickly he stepped into the pilot-house; opened the drawer where the charts were kept.

"Yes," he nodded; "one is gone."

"To south'ard?"

"Yep."

It was a plan then, a careful, deliberate plan. Sometime, days before the mutiny probably, Sampson must have abstracted that chart. Mad? Possibly. But a most dangerous madman, a maniac cunning and clever in detail, utterly undeterred by conscience. Impetuously the two young officers began to fire at the man at the auxiliary-wheel; but the distance was altogether too great for effective fire; and it was only ten minutes before the ever-ingenious Sampson had ripped off one of the metal bulkhead doors and propped it up in front of the wheel as a screen. Spattering half-spent bullets against this defence was as futile as slinging mud-pies against a brick wall. And, very shortly, quite defeated, Selden and Parke desisted and jumped down to the chart-room. The compass, and their sights checked up with the sun, showed that the *Paoli's* course lay now southeast by south three-quarters south.

So, helpless to help themselves, bound out across the wide, hot waters of the equatorial sea, the besieged men on the bridge of the ship drifted ever nearer and nearer to whatever fate should hold in store for them. Big Sampson, the murderous mulatto, was in undisputed command.

Save for the constant need for vigilance and the monotony of their diet their plight was, in other respects, not an uncomfortable one. Water had been providentially stored in sufficient quantity to admit of a reasonable allowance for every man; and the food, such as it was, was adequate. The men grumbled now and again; but the choice between a cooped-up life forward and that chaos of negro misrule on the after-deck was an easy choice to make. For though the *Paoli* plunged steadily ahead, and though it was apparent that some sort of discipline must be being maintained in the engine-room, the conduct of the negroes when off duty demonstrated the easy reversion to savagery.

By day, the big, almost-naked men slept about the broiling deck, impervious, it would seem, to the tropic sun; by night a limitless supply of fiery liquor roused them to wild shouts and screams of frenzy. Sampson, always himself appearing with two revolvers slung at his belt, had sequestered, it could be guessed, the rest of the ammunition and arms; for no longer was there any shooting; but the weird songs and chants, the shrieking bellows of the maddened singers, made the night horrible.

Forward, one of the officers kept ceaseless watch with at least one of the seamen, while the rest of the men amused themselves as best they could with a greasy deck of cards and such limited supply of tobacco as had been salvaged from the steward's stores. For comfort they had rigged themselves awnings from the old sails found in the forepeak; and under the shade of these improvised awnings, forward of the superstructure of the wheel-house, they dozed and drowsed through the long days and smothering tropic nights.

Gustafson, the mate, mortally wounded, was found dead one morning; his brave fight finished. He had spoken no intelligible words since his one recovery of consciousness. He, too, with reverent ceremony, went down to the depths of ocean to follow his captain and the chief.

THEN, one night, Selden on watch was surprized to hear the engines suddenly die. Slowly the good ship *Paoli* lost momentum in the water. Listening for some indication of the cause of the sudden quiet the second mate could distinguish nothing. Aft it was as peaceful as if the vessel were derelict. Silent she drifted there into the black void of sea and sky. Had Sampson been overcome; his authority wrested from him? It seemed the natural explanation. Yet no hub-bub of savage voices proclaimed a victory. Instead, in the utter dark of the night, the soft song drifted—so ironic in its words:

"Goin' up to heaven for to choose my seat
Lay my crown at my Jesus' feet;
Pharoah's army done drownded—
Oh, Mary don't weep.

Goin' up to heaven for to sing and shout
No one there for to put me out;
Pharoah's army done drownded—
Oh, Mary don't weep."

Did another attack impend? Cautious, Selden lay and watched. But no figure moved on the after-deck, or upon the well deck between stem and stern. The dead night, heavy with the import of rain, sheethed them in soggy darkness.

Only dawn brought explanation. There, to leeward, lay the long green, swampy coast of Africa; and southward a few miles beyond, a stretch of yellow sand rimmed by curling white foam; with rugged dunes behind where red-topped roofs of houses showed vivid amid the glossy green mangoes, bread-fruit trees and graceful palms. The *Paoli* had reached port.

Just where they were it was impossible for Selden to estimate exactly. They had no access to the taffrail-log, no knowledge of their average speed; and for the last few days their course had wavered so crazily that only by the position of the stars at night could their position be even roughly determined.

The sun told the second mate that they were in the neighborhood of latitude ten north; and, roughly figuring as he must, he had the choice of Sierra Leone, or the Ivory Coast of Liberia. Considering the general make-up of the gang of mutineers it was probably the latter country. That was the country that such a man as Sampson would select. The mulatto, with some knowledge of navigation inevitably picked up after so many years at sea, and with the aid of the stolen chart, would have had no great difficulty in making his landfall. Every circumstance pointed to a deliberate, preconceived plan.

But what plan? Did the mutineers intend to go ashore and settle among the natives; and leave the white men with the ship? Scarcely; murder and mutiny would not be necessary to a mere migration. Besides, Sampson had sense enough to know that Liberia is at least a fairly civilized land, in diplomatic connection with Washington, with laws and an extradition treaty.

The answer to the problem came soon, though. For scarcely had the improvised anchor splashed over the stern than one of the after-boats was swung free, and Sampson and four of his henchmen slid down the falls to their places. Sampson, decked out in his best blue uniform, with a white cap, and several medals simulating decorations on his breast, took his seat on red cushions in the stern of the boat; while the four negroes, all immaculate in clean white duck, though bare-headed and with huge, naked feet braced against the thwarts, swiftly rowed the boat in over the foam-sprayed bar. Selden, watching them go, entertained for a moment the idea of trying to storm the after-deck and regain the ship.

He was just about to make the suggestion to Parke, when that young officer himself, from his perch on the roof of the pilot-house where he had gone to watch Sampson's departure, yelled:

"Come up here, Jack."

Selden clambered aloft. A single glimpse told him that again the giant mulatto had been too clever for them; that he too had thought of the possibility of the officers attempting to take the ship during his absence ashore.

For beneath the stern of the vessel, freighted upon a sort of crude raft made from slabs of hatch covering, lay the dismantled propeller of the ship. Sampson, suspecting the very thing that Selden had been meditating, had evidently had the propeller unshipped from the crank shaft and placed on the raft, where four negroes waited for any threatening move on the part of the enemy forward.

One sign of attack; and the propeller would be chucked overboard into ten fathoms of water. And then of what use would be the ship? Patiently, therefore, or as patiently as they could be expected to be, the officers waited for the next development. A dozen different signals to the shore remained unanswered. There was nothing to do but wait.

They waited nearly all day. The sun was low to the sea when again Sampson's boat appeared. Two figures in gray sat with the gaudily garbed mulatto in the stern. Coming closer it could be discerned that they were also colored men. The two strangers were ushered aboard the *Paoli* with elaborate courtesy, and disappeared into the engineer's cabin. Below the overhang of the stern of the vessel some of the engine-room crew were busy re-shipping the propeller. Sampson intended moving again.

With the coming of the heavy night, still laden with the omen of rain, the after-deck was brilliantly illuminated once more. Electric lights had been strung above the after superstructure and dangled over the stern, so that the men who worked on the propeller might see to finish their labor. Their was no sign of disorder, though; no drinking.

It was near nine o'clock when Sampson and his two guests reappeared. They evidently had not been too temperate, however, for their voices were loud and boisterous.

"Ho, the bridge!" roared Sampson.

Wary, not exposing himself, Selden answered the hail.

"Two gentlemen to see you, Mister Selden," called the mulatto. "Come aft. I give you my word you won't be annoyed."

"Come forward," shouted Selden.

He had precious little confidence in a treacherous murderer's word.

The three figures in the brilliant light consulted for a moment. Then, slowly and rather uneasily the two men in dingy gray began to move. They were accompanied by Duke, the ebony cook. Sampson was taking no chances.

Slowly, with the gloom behind him so that he might fall into no trap, Selden worked his way down the barricade of the companion-ladder and met the emissaries. They were shabby enough, but dressed in European clothes. They even wore shoes—large yellow shoes with bulldog toes.

"You are the second mate of this ship?" said the first, in the precise school-English so common to the colonies.

"I am the master," replied Selden shortly.

"Ah—I see."

The first man, the taller, turned to his companion and spoke rapidly in a native dialect.

"That is what Captain Sampson said you

would say," he nodded. "Do you not think you have made a great mistake, Mister—er——"

"Selden."

"Ah—yes—Selden."

"Why?"

But there was little use of the question. These local big-wigs, whoever they were, had been filled up with some fool story by Sampson. That was apparent. It was easy to judge where their sympathy would lie.

"You had better come ashore peacefully; so that Captain Sampson may proceed with his ship."

The speaker was trying to be diplomatic, apparently.

"His ship! The —— murderer!" Anger submerged diplomacy.

Again the two civilians conversed rapidly in dialect. It was evident that they were not open to argument. Sampson had convinced them. Duke, a tall, grim, splendid-looking fellow stood sharply at attention.

"I am," began the taller Liberian again, "the mayor—" he pronounced it in two distinct syllables "may or"—"of yonder city."

Jack Selden grinned impolitely.

"Yonder city" numbered about fifty houses, mostly mud and thatch. "You don't tell me?" he snorted.

"Ah, yes, but I do tell you," insisted his interlocutor. "I am the may-or. And if force is necessary I shall send out my police department."

"Glad to see him," jeered the young officer.

But the time-worn jest was over the head of his honor.

"You have until morning to decide."

There was no suavity now in the colored man's tone. He was getting down to business.

"You will go ashore peacefully. We shall remain here on board until you do. You will be sent to the capital—under guard—where you may state your claims to the American representative. Captain Sampson will, meanwhile, take this ship."

"Why—but—" exclaimed Selden, outraged; "the ship's papers—I'll show you——"

"Any one can forge papers," interposed the mayor cunningly. "I do not wish to inspect your—er—documents. You will go ashore—peacefully."

"And suppose I don't go ashore peacefully, old timer? Suppose I choose to stay here. We're getting on very nicely as it is, friend."

The mayor delivered his ultimatum. He spoke gravely now, with native dignity, without bombast.

"We have had our share of fighting in this country," he said calmly. "We are colored men; but still can fight. And we have—since nineteen hundred and fourteen—learned the ways of modern warfare. We have machine guns in the town. And we can use them."

The man paused. Then shortly—

"And will."

He spoke to his companion. Together they turned, guarded by the impassive Duke.

"You have until tomorrow sunrise, Mister Selden."

Jack Selden could have shot all three of them there and then. His hand was on his revolver butt. And, after what Sampson had done to the captain and the chief he certainly had no restraining instincts. But to what profit? Sampson was the brains of the whole thing. And Sampson played safe.

Above, behind the rude barricade of boards, the white sailors, assembled with Parke, had heard the conversation. As Selden climbed up over the network of planks and stakes he was aware that there was a whispered debate going on. Parke pulled him by the sleeve; drew him into the dimly lighted chart-room.

"The sailors want to quit. They're ready to do what Sampson says," Parke whispered.

"The —— you say?"

"Yes. They heard what that chap said about machine-guns. It seems the easiest way out. They'll all get off safe they say."

And Jack Selden had no answer. Disregarding the men who were gathered forward of the pilot-house he walked around to the top of the starboard companionway and sat down in the darkness to think.

He was faced with a serious decision. What Sampson had done was apparent. Dressed in all his finery it would have been easy for him to make an impression upon the half-educated officials of a small African village. They were his own people, too. That they had swallowed Sampson's story was certain. And, indeed, all appearances seemed to confirm the truth of the mulatto's lie. It was the white men who were barricaded, at bay.

Sampson had possession of the ship. And knowing the man's character, his uncanny influence upon people of his own race, Selden could not doubt that he could command aid from the shore. In that event—they would be as helpless there, cooped up behind their tinder barricade, against one machine-gun as against a whole battery of field artillery.

And even his own white men were threatening to desert him. Well, why not? It was possible—indeed, probable, that the negroes from the shore would assure them all safe conduct. They would be sent to the capital; ultimately shipped home. Why not?

But Jack Selden immediately rejected the alternative. He thought of his captain; of the chief; of that bloody bit of severed thumb.

No, he would never give in. He was captain of the *Paoli* now. He had his duty to perform. It was his ship.

Head in his hands, he sat on, there in the darkness. But in his heart he knew that he would finish the fight.

The whisperings of his own sailors, there behind him, finally died. Whatever their opinions, none had dared face him. Instinctively they had known better than that. Presently a snore or two told him that most of his men were asleep.

But aft there were still bright lights; still two or three big firemen wandering the deck. Lights shone from the ports of Sampson's cabin.

Watching, Jack Selden wondered at the quiet. Sampson must have commanded order. He was trying to maintain his impression of authority.

When, then, one big negro, suddenly appeared, reeling wildly out of the galley door, Selden could not suppress a chuckle of satisfaction. Clearly he could see that the relieved fireman had a bottle in his hand. Three others rushed upon the lucky newcomer and tried to wrench the bottle from his grip. But the big black hung fast. There was a subdued scuffle; then a roaring oath.

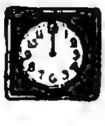
Instantly, it seemed, Sampson was on the deck. An automatic pistol shone in his hand. The three sober colored men ran, as if they had glimpsed a ghost. The other stood, swaying, facing his chief. The bottle was slopping liquor on the deck plates.

In the bright light the whole scene was as clear as if played on a stage. The almost-naked fireman, grease streaking his brown face, mouth wide open in consternation; in one hand the half-empty bottle; the other hand groping backward as if for the support of the bulwark: and opposite him Sampson the mulatto Sampson—with white face grim and horrible. In the utter stillness of the soggy night the harsh words carried up to Selden as if they had been spoken at his elbow.

"I told you that no one was to drink tonight. I have locked up all the liquor. You will disobey me, will you!"

The pistol flashed up to the horizontal. The crash of the report and the fall of the drunken fireman were simultaneous.

Sampson turned back to his cabin. The brown body of the fireman lay flat on its back beneath the glare of the lights. No one came to take it away.



MIDNIGHT. Only his watch told Jack Selden the hour, for now that there was no need of a wheelsman the ship's bell was not struck. And still the second mate sat by the starboard companionway. He alone was awake; for the rest, stirred by Sampson's shot, had struggled to consciousness only long enough to be reassured, and to sink back again to restless slumber. Aft the lights were out, Sampson's cabin dark. So far as Selden could see no one kept the deck—no one save the corpse of the dead fireman.

Was Sampson so sure then of the white men's surrender? Or did he rest in the confidence that he could easily overpower any raid, fortressed there in his arsenal of a cabin?

Again an hour passed in utter silence. It was so still that Selden, sitting alone, could hear the distant sigh of the surf across the harbor bar.

What would happen tomorrow? No one could tell. Whether his own men, even, would stand behind him in a last fight against overpowering odds was a serious question. Harry Parke he could depend on; yes, Harry was game. But the rest?

Suppose they surrendered? The thought kept recurring regularly, repugnant though it was. Would they, even then, be safe? To Selden, with the memory of the captain shot down mercilessly, with the memory of the chief, killed with a cleaver while his back was turned, with the clear vision of that drunken fireman, unarmed and helpless, murdered as stood; there seemed little likelihood that Sampson would keep faith. And, above all, Jack Selden knew that he could not surrender. It was not in his blood; generations of his ancestors had been true to the splendid tradition of the sea. A captain sinks with his ship. And this was his ship, now—his ship. He would stand by.

And this would be his last night. There seemed no other answer. With sunrise would come the reckoning. Tomorrow night— Well, what did one dead man matter after all? Look up at the stars, millions of them; perhaps all of them inhabited. What did one dead man matter? That dead man aft, on the deck—was he perhaps looking up with his dead eyes to the clustering constellations of the sky? What did it matter to them—or to him, a dead man!

He had been shot down, the poor savage, because——

"Judas!"

As if lightning had lashed down from an azure heaven a thought came to Jack Selden. Instantly he was on his feet, slipping down the barricade, gliding into the captain's cabin. With a key from his pocket he unlocked the master's medicine-closet. A scratched match, flaring brightly, showed him what he sought. With a chuckle of delight the mate grabbed a quart bottle and rummaged in the depths of the closet. His hand came out with an earthenware gallon jug.

Assuring himself that the porthole of the bathroom was well shrouded, Selden lighted a candle. Then, first he smelled and tasted the contents of the jug. Whisky? Yes.

Four full tumblers of it he poured down the drain. Then, so that he might not spill a drop, he decanted into the jug the contents of the quart medicine bottle. As if shaking a cocktail he mixed medicine and liquor. Then, sniffing, he shook his head, smiled, and, to himself muttered:—

"But they won't mind."

He put out the light.

Out on the level of the well-deck he made a careful reconnaissance. Not a sound from the after quarter; not a light. Without hesitation, and pausing only to remove his shoes, he started aft, climbed the companionway, crouching, and waited there in the darkness. Motionless as if she had been run ashore the ship lay on the flat surface of the placid bay. Jack Selden put the jug down, and waited. Just before him was a dark heap, like a heavy log.

He reached forward and touched the body of the dead fireman. It was cold and stiff already.

"The booze got you, poor ——. Maybe——"

Selden picked up his jug, stepped over the dead man, and tiptoed to the door that opened down into the firemen's quarters. At the threshold of the door he set the jug of whisky.

Then, silently as he had come, again stepping over the dead man, he went back to his post on the starboard companionway.

There was nothing now to do but wait. Dawn would tell the story. In those few short minutes that intervene between the coming of the morning's earliest light and the leap of the full orbed sun into dazzling radiance, for there is little twilight in the tropics, the fate of Jack Selden's scheme must be determined. He had planned well. Now what?

He had yet an hour or two to wait. He could not force the issue. Fatalist, as are most who follow the sea, Jack Selden considered that the future was now quite out of his power to control. The period of perplexity and of anticipation was finished; there could now come only the crisis. In such mood he dozed until dawn waked him.

But with the first pale light of the new day he was instinctively wide awake. He saw that the day favored him. A dull mist, heavy almost as smoke, hovered over the water as if a blanket of gray had been drawn between the ship and the heavens. The full light of the rising sun would take some minutes at least to dispel the haze. And these would be precious minutes well-gained.

None of the sailors was yet stirring. It was not part of Selden's plan to arouse them; for he was yet dubious as to their wholehearted support after the grumbling of yesterday evening. But Parke, sleeping in the middle of the deck crew, he did awaken; gently pressing the young mate's hand so that he should rouse without a sudden start. Selden motioned his friend to follow. Together they crept out of the fetid pilot-house to their post on the bridge. The light was strong enough now to give fairly clear view of the after-deck.

Almost immediately a single negro appeared. It was Duke, the huge second cook, a man, in appearance and bearing at least, far superior to the rest of the mutineers. And in his hand Duke carried the jug which Selden had so carefully smuggled aft. The big colored man sniffed; then drank only a swallow. He put the jug down on deck; looked at it; looked at the drawn shades of the portholes of Sampson's cabin; then went over to the lifeboat on the port beam. Alone he began to swing out the davits. The lifeboat was ready for the slip of the falls.

"Thought Sampson had locked up the booze," said Parke.

"We'll see."

Uncertain yet as to the success of his scheme Selden was venturing no prediction. But inwardly he was tremblingly excited. His whole success, his life indeed, depended upon this ruse he had so skillfully arranged. And the big fellow, Duke, at least, had not succumbed to the temptation of the drugged drink. If the others too refused——

And, at the instant, two of the firemen appeared. Instantly they saw the jug. They looked at it: looked at each other. Duke, laboring hard at the davits had not seen them. In accord they grabbed the jug and slid around to the starboard side of the deck-house where they would be out of Duke's sight. But Selden and Parke could see them distinctly. Both of the big negroes tipped the jug to their mouths; both drank deeply.

"Now if the others ——" whispered Selden. And was silent as three more, two Mexicans and another negro appeared. They also drank heavily. One Mexican half-breed ducked back to the fire-room quarters; and presently the whole gang were on deck. All sampled the jug; once and then again and again. The whole thing had consumed not more than ten minutes of time.

It was then that Duke, finished with his work at the lifeboat, came upon them suddenly. Whatever he said could not be distinguished forward; but the mutineers, one of them still clinging tenaciously to the jug of liquor, backed away from his scowling rebuke as if in mortal fear. Then Sampson appeared. He was in white shirt and trousers; his feet bare. But in either hand was a revolver.

Selden and Parke waited breathlessly, ill-concealed behind their flimsy barricade. The words of the big mulatto, choking with rage, reached them in a garble of dialect and obscenity. The man was insanely angry. For an instant it appeared that he would shoot down the whole crew. And they, helpless in the face of his driving wrath, would evidently have put up no fight. They crowded and cowered behind each other like sheep trying to avoid the knife of the butcher.

Finally, at an undistinguished command, the man with the jug cringed forward. Sampson sniffed the liquor. His face was black with rage. He raised the jug above his head; swept it down as if driving a maul. The jug shattered into a hundred fragments. Brown liquid dribbled and spread across the deck plates.

"You fools!" came the engineer's bellowing roar; "you black, drunken hogs!"

He drew back his fist to strike.

But before the blow could reach the shaking victim the fellow began to sway. Noiselessly, as if his legs had turned suddenly to wet paper, he sank upon the deck. Another man, in the rear rank of the crowd, began also to grope and sway. Then he too fell.

"What have you done, Jack?" breathed Harry Parke. "Poisoned them?"

"Dunno," grunted Selden.

And he didn't much care. After what had happened, mere murder seemed a small detail. He was fully occupied now with what was happening aft; he had no time for moral theories.

Already another fireman had fallen. There were but five left; though Duke, who had prudently left the stuff alone, still stood at his chief's shoulder.

The two visitors, half-dressed, appeared. Both gesticulated wildly, hotly excited; and rather scared, Selden thought. Sampson gave them a few words; then turned back to his stricken supporters.

And now, one by one, the men fell. They lay where they sank alone, or one across the other as they happened to tumble. Within ten minutes, as the engineer, Duke and the two visitors looked on helplessly, all eight of the drugged firemen had collapsed. Not one stirred. They might, all of them, be dead.

"And now?" questioned Parke.

"Sampson's move," was Selden's answer.

Behind the two officers who watched this strange spectacle the deck crew had slowly gathered. The men said nothing, watching; though the significance of what was going on was perfectly evident to them. Well armed, all of them, they bent forward eagerly, waiting the word for attack. Sampson, as if by a miracle, was at their mercy.

Still Selden hesitated to order a charge. He was curious to see——

Aft, Sampson had looked around quickly. He was not lacking in decision. His gang of cut-throats was useless to him now. And he was quick to realize it. The big mulatto spied the swinging lifeboat. A word to Duke, and the ebony giant was at the falls. The boat dipped down; plopped into the water. Sampson and the two native visitors were sliding down before Selden was entirely apprized of the nature of their intent. The lifeboat was cast loose and began to move away.

"Come on. After them!" yelled Jack Selden.

Recklessly he leaped all the way to the well deck, clearing the splintery barricade in his jump. The rest followed.

Reaching the taffrail the lifeboat was still not more than forty yards away. Sampson and Duke were at the oars. A salvo of pistol shots sounded.

But still the lifeboat moved.

Though only Duke still sat upright on the rower's seat. Sampson, either hit or terrified, had sought cover flat on his face in the boat's bottom. He and the two natives were huddled in a heap. But still the intrepid Duke pulled at his sweeps.

"Hit him; hit him!" yelled Parke. "Sink the —— boat."

The pistols were discharged again and again like firecrackers. All about the lifeboat the white spurts of water showed the inaccuracy of the excited sailors' aim. The lifeboat still moved away toward safety. In a minute now it might be out of range.

"Get off the starboard lifeboat," snapped Selden.

Parke and Becker rushed for it; worked frantically at the lashings. Selden, with only an automatic pistol yet loaded, continued to fire after the escaping engineer. But his bullets were already splashing the water yards in the boat's wake.

"Get off that boat!" he cursed. "They're getting away from us."

"Can't," grunted Parke. "The falls are knotted and tarred. They won't work."

Here was another illustration of Sampson's forehandedness. He was taking no chances of possible pursuit in the event of a sudden turn in the situation; nor was he anticipating allowing any of his own disorderly crew to desert. Prudently he had fixed the extra boats so that it would be the toll of many minutes to free them.

Disgusted, boiling with resentment that the murderer should actually escape after being so nearly captured, Selden turned to supervise the labor of loosing the starboard boat from its intricate entanglements. Sampson and his companions had little over a mile to cover before finding the safety of the shore. Once in that African sanctuary he would be perfectly secure from apprehension. As well try to catch the east wind. Was the man to escape the penalty of his villainies? That Selden had regained his ship was of small comfort in this greater disappointment. And still the starboard lifeboat could not be stirred.

It remained for Old Higginson, the phlegmatic quartermaster, to announce the news. Never particularly energetic, the old man had found no place at the lifeboat for his activity and was contentedly supervising the efforts of the others.

Occasionally he had glanced calmly at the receding figure of Duke, still bending hard to his oars.

"They're settlin'," he remarked, pointing.

Selden saw that it was true. The boat, several hundred yards away by now, was undoubtedly lower in the water.

"By George! We must have punctured them! Hurry with that other boat."

Duke was struggling harder; that was evident. Under him his craft, weighted by the useless load of the three terrified passengers, was settling lower and lower in the water.

"Wonder if they can swim?" mused Higginson placidly.

Amiable old mariner that he was he had a completely hard-boiled soul. A seafaring man—well—he lived or he didn't live. It was largely a matter of luck. And that was all there was to it, in Higginson's philosophy. Here was just another episode in the many-paged log of his life.

"They'll be havin' a chance to prove it now," he added, spitting tobacco juice into the puddle of spilled liquor about the firemen's motionless forms.

For Sampson's boat had vanished. Four figures were paddling slowly in the sapphire blue waters of the bay.

"Can swim," muttered the old quartermaster, almost as if disappointed.

IT WAS two hours later. In the cabin that had been the Chief Engineer's sat Sampson and the impassive Duke. Both were weighted with handcuffs and leg-irons. The native visitors had been permitted to paddle their terrified way ashore. They were none of Selden's concern.

Handling them like logs the sailors had dragged the bodies of the inanimate firemen down into their sleeping quarters and piled them on the floor. But Jack Selden had taken the precaution of turning the key on the outside of the door.

"Why; aren't they dead?" Parke had inquired, mystified.

"Don't think so. Just doped. Unless they drank about a pint apiece. They'll come out of it." Selden had grinned.

"Just bad booze?"

"No," laughed the second mate, "good booze. The best; but with about a quart of paregoric in it. Good cure for a stomach-ache, paregoric; but camphorated tincture of opium; works like morphine. Found about a quart of it in the captain's closet. It worked. But those boys will have a headache when they come to—and find themselves headed for Virginia justice."

"I'll say they will," was all that Harry Parke had found words to agree.

He knew the potency of the household remedy; it is a sovereign specific among sailormen. Paregoric in reason, yes; but a quart of it among eight!

"Though," Parke added, "I should have thought they'd tasted it. Paregoric's got a pretty strong smell."

"I had to gamble on that," Jack Selden admitted. "Duke did taste it, I guess, and let it alone. But the others—well—they hadn't had any liquor for several days. Sampson had seen to that. And you know what those bucks will drink when they get ashore; anything that's got a kick in it. Ever taste the stuff they're selling on Delaware Avenue or South Street these days? What's a little thing like a queer flavor in the life of a thirsty fireman!"

Below, both the second and third engineers had been found, still alive, though frightfully weak. They had lived through endless days at the verge of the threshold of death. But under their direction and with the feeble assistance of the slowly recuperating mutineers the engines had been started. With Sampson and his faithful Duke bolted and barred in the brig beneath the forepeak there was no murmur of mutiny left.

"West by north" was Selden's order to Old Higginson at the wheel.

The *Paoli* was homeward bound.

IT WAS a strange tale that was told at the bar of Virginia justice.

Sampson, hopelessly mad now, could but babble his daft delusions. But from what fragments of his story could be pieced together; and from the reports of Federal officers long interested in a shipping swindle that had defrauded many worthy colored people Sampson's scheme came out clear.

An able man, clever and skilful at his trade, his long pondering over what he fancied to be white injustice had become finally an obsession. With confederates in Liberia, fugitive from the American law, he had schemed artfully to steal an American vessel, so disguising it as to avoid apprehension and using it only in the African coastwise trade.

His plan had grown upon him, day and night, until he was able to see only his ultimate purpose. And as obstacles rose in his way: theft, mutiny, assault, murder, massacre of a whole crew; they had all dwindled in significance. His end! He must achieve it!

But moral fiber, once weakened, crumbles like ice beneath sunshine; and one violent crime succeeding another leads inevitably to lunacy. Sampson lived on a few months to die in his mad-house.

The *Paoli* still sails. She can be seen in the harbors of the world, ship-shape and shining; by Liverpool docks at daybreak, along the quays of Havre, by Naples' mole where moonlight gleams on the crimson smoke cowl of Vesuvius; or with plumes of spray at her bow as she plows the blue depths of the Narrows.

"Yessir," Old Higginson will greet visitors stepping to her gangplank. "Yessir, cap'n is aboard. Yessir—Cap'n Jack Selden!"

Slants on LIFE

Fruit-Tramps

by Bill Adams

I DON'T know a more colorful sight than a green-fruit house in Summer. We speak of "green fruit" meaning peaches, "cots," plums, grapes, etc., etc., etc., as opposed to oranges. It is a man's job waiting on a dozen fast peach-packers. Girls of eighteen packing out 325 crates a day. Hop along! They sure are some li'l' wrens when they get their pay-checks. Dance by the river fifty miles away on Saturday night, and work eight hours again on Sunday. The fruit-tramp life has a curious fascination. They follow it up—Lindsay, November to New Year, navel oranges, then south to the southern California oranges and the Imperial Valley cantaloup fields. Then to Modesto for the Valencias in April to June. Then the valley towns for cots and peaches—grapes in August and September and October—pomegranates and grapes in October and November—apples from September to November in the Yakima and Wenatchee Valleys, Washington. The tramps follow the fruit—men and women. Some of 'em take along a dog, too. They're a gay crew, craps and poker. Shoot it away. "Easy come, easy go" is what they say, and they work like the —— to make it, too. Cratemakers come to work with their hands stiff with cramp—crate-making is piecework. They knock up a matter of six hundred or so a day. Packers lie awake with cramps in their hands.

The old crew is passing out. A new order is coming in. The romance of the fruit-tramp is a thing no man has ever touched yet—all color, color, color—pink, blue, white, green aprons and little caps on their heads, or bare heads. Men in denims and old "best suits"—a steady rush and tear all the year round. The old crowd all knew one another. They were drunkards. They were frightfully clannish. An outsider couldn't get a job anyhow. It was hard to break into the gang. They are wonderful workers. No bad work passes—accuracy. You hardly ever see a "shiner"—*i. e.*, a nail driven crooked so that the point sticks out of the wood.

The packers "hog" the fruit. Each packer is an hour at each bin, moving up as the clock moves, hour by hour. This gives an equal share of large or small fruit to all. The "fruit-hogs" get to the bins where the big fruit is and try to hang on there beyond their limit. They try to skip the bins of "three sixtys"—the dinky oranges that are slow packing.

Fruit-tramping has a big fascination.

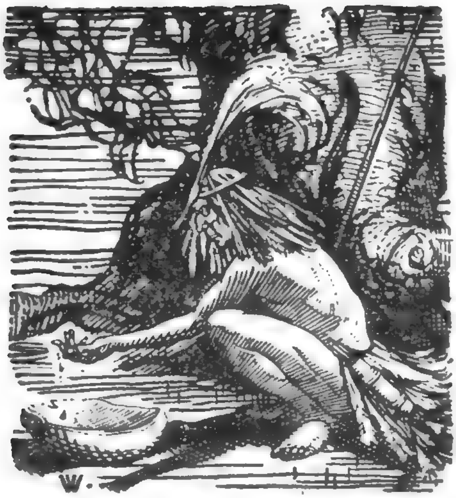
They hate the sight of a church.

The towns all hold them up for the biggest price they can.

The merchants put up everything, soaking the outside fruit-tramp. The term fruit-tramp is despised by the town folks almost as badly as the term "home guard" is despised by the tramps; all the townspeople being known as home guards. It is owing to the fact that so large a number of home guards, *i. e.*, local folks, have taken to packing away nowadays that the old-time tramp-crew is getting broken up, and customs changing. There is a *camaraderie* and a code amongst them. You never heard of one of the old-timers—they are mostly all young, old-timer being merely a figure—being in a hole. If he couldn't pay his board bill he was trusted by the restaurant men to send it on from another town, or to pay next season—and he always did, too. If he did happen to make a beat, and skip, his bill was fairly safe to be paid by the others of the tramp clan. I know a man who runs a little chop-house who has been owed as high as six hundred dollars on meals by the fruit-tramps, and who hadn't a sign of worry.

"The boys is straight." That's what he'd say.

Tramps don't care. I always get the fruit-tramp itch this time of year—a fascinating life—all color, and laughter, and dancing, and whistling—sweet—and aching arms, also—all in the day's work.



THE KING OF NO MAN'S LAND

A Four-Part Story
Part One

by

Arthur O. Friel

Author of "Thicker Than Water," "The Thirty Gang," etc.

CHAPTER I

MEN OF THE BUSH

THE head-hunter was consulting the devil.

Alone in the jungle, his back against the base of a colossal tree, his glassy eyes fixed in a vacant stare, he listened to the satanic counsel of the death-demon of the Jiveros. At his feet lay a calabash, containing the dregs of the coffee-colored bark decoction with which he had raised that malevolent spirit. Beside him, leaning against one of the tall buttress-roots among which he squatted, rose a straight, slender tube; his blow-gun. Against his hip hung his short dart-quiver, cotton-ball, and poison-gourd. The wish and the weapons for murder were his; and now he was receiving the diabolical approbation always sought by his people before an assassination—and always accorded.

"Kill him!" exhorted the demon. "It will be easy. Call him out—then shoot him. It is right that he should die, for he has four wives and you have only two. Then you will have six women, and a new head to shrink, and respect from your fellows."

The vacant eyes did not flicker, nor did the lips move. But the drugged brain visioned the shadowy grin of the fiend, and the crazed consciousness answered without speech.

"But he has brothers who will take my head in turn, and take his women and my own too."

"No!" disputed the infernal adviser. "Why stop at killing him alone? Kill them also, one by one, as fast as you can shrink the heads—for you must not neglect to make the heads small, and you can do only one at a time. So you shall have more heads, and more women. The youngest brother has no women yet, but his head is a head. Think of it! More women than the fingers on both your hands, and one—two—three—four fine heads! And then nobody will laugh at you because you lost that white-man head."

The dilated eyes narrowed slightly as a scowl lowered the black brows.

"Bad luck has been upon me since the head of the white was lost," was the soundless confession. "But how could I know that the head would be stolen while I was away on a hunt? If only I could get a white-man head with red hair! That would be better than the black-haired one I lost."

The demon laughed jeeringly.

"You are not likely to get another white-man head soon. You must kill that Indian with four wives. You must! And then his brothers. It is so easy—you will do it in this way. Be quiet and I will tell you."

The weird dialog went on. The scattered splotches of sunlight on the forest floor crawled slowly toward the motionless figure in the dim root-recess. Little breezes came and went. Somewhere a toucan yelped over and over: "*Piapoco! piapoco! piapoco!*" High above, invisible through the thick roof

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"The King of No Man's Land," copyright, 1924, Arthur O. Friel.

of branches and leaves, flying macaws screamed harshly. The narcotized senses of the squatting aborigine perceived none of these things. The Jivero demon-draught, which may grip its devotee for five hours or more, still held him in thrall.

Even when one of the creeping sun-splashes reached his feet and began ascending his legs he did not move. The rising light revealed muscular calves and haunches; stocky, deep-chested torso; thick neck encircled by a collar-like necklace of seeds and tiger-claws; heavy jaw, hard mouth, flaring nose; snaky eyes, low brow, long black hair. In the hair were a few bright toucan-feathers; from it, at the sides, projected ears thrust through with sections of wild cane which dangled to the shoulders. His build was that of a brute. His expression, as he still talked with the fiend he had called up, was that of a reptile. Limned against the gray-green tree as by a spotlight, he was a copper statue of abysmal savagery.

A flash of orange and red darted athwart the near green, followed by another and another. They wheeled, halted, poised on limbs, and became toucans. A moment of turning their huge-beaked heads this way and that—then they burst into raucous derision of the man below.

"*Piapoco! Piapoco!*" they yapped, hopping and thrusting their beaks as they yelled. Their screams, so near him, jarred on the dulled nerves of the savage. His opaque eyes flicked up at the birds. One hand stole automatically toward his blow-gun—but did not grasp it. The devil was insistently recalling his attention, and the hand sank.

"You will do it so!" adjured the evil spirit. "And then the head—cut down the back of the scalp—out comes the skull—then the pot and the hot sand——"

"*Piapoco! piapoco! piapoco! piapoco!*" railed the impudent chorus above.

Then, abruptly, it stopped. The big bills turned downward—but not toward the head-hunter. The black-red-gold bodies hopped around, the bold black eyes peered into the tangle—then three flashes shot again across the green. The birds were gone.

Only a Jivero whose instincts were numbed could fail to interpret that sudden silence and departure. But this man did fail. His eyes moved upward again, but in a vacant way. When they dropped they saw nothing new in the labyrinth of tree and vine. Nor did the protruding ears hear a tiny rustle among the leaves beyond.

For minutes the rustling continued—faint, elusive, less audible than the sough of lofty leaves moving in a breeze. Then it died. No other sound came, save the far-off snarling roar of a *colomono* monkey. The near-by bush seemed to hold no life. But the noisy birds did not return.

Among the shadows where that rustle had sounded, something moved. A bent, hunched thing, it was; a crouching thing that stole slowly, smoothly nearer to the devil-dreamer. Leaves which touched it slipped soundlessly from its bare skin. Little pools left by the daily rain gave no plash as the advancing feet passed through them. No twig crackled, no branch swished back from the creeping form. Yet it made no apparent effort to avoid noise, gave no glance at the footing or the surrounding growth. It moved with the instinctive stealth of the born jungle-prowler, the utter silence of a drifting ghost. When it stopped, still crouching and peering through the leafy screen at the spellbound murderer among the roots, it had given not the slightest token of its presence.

For a long moment it stood there—a black-haired, light-skinned, maroon-clouted shadow among the shadows; a jungle man like the Jivero, yet altogether unlike him. The newcomer's bare body appeared more clean of skin and of build; his hair was not long and unkempt, but cut straight around at the level of the ear-tips. He looked more fit, more alert, more intelligent than the killer beyond him. Yet his face, as he scanned the other, held a ferocity no less deadly than that of the shrinker of human heads.

The menace of that narrow-eyed stare penetrated to the inmost consciousness of the squatting savage. Where bird-warning and bush-warning had passed unheeded, the primordial perception of unseen danger inherited from countless jungle-dwelling ancestors now gripped his brain. The voice of the demon died out. The blank eyes focused on the bush. The dangling right hand lifted and moved again toward the blow-gun. As his fingers curled around the weapon, the Jivero lurched up on his feet.

The leaves before him jumped, smitten by a swift-rising hand. A steel-tipped shaft poised, hissed forward. Before the Jivero could move—before he could even breathe—the steel tore through him. He reeled back—coughed once—hung limp, nailed to the tree.

"Huh!" grunted the man in the bush, his grim mouth stretching gloatingly.

Then, turning, he grunted again—a subdued, wordless sound which did not carry far, yet brought immediate response. The rustling recommenced, more loudly now. Through the tangle came other figures in file. The spearman stepped out, walked over to the transfixed head-hunter, and stood in the attitude of a showman about to exhibit some marvel.

THE bush-screen parted again, forced open by rough hands. Into the little clear space emerged a hawk-faced, fierce-mustached, deep-tanned Spaniard. After him trooped more Indians.

One swift survey of the scene the white man took, noting the impaled savage, the blow-gun which had fallen from the lifeless hand, the gourd with its remaining drug. With a tigerish pounce he caught up the calabash. An instant of sniffing, then he nodded and tossed it aside.

"Is this all?" he jeered, jerking a thumb at the pierced figure against the tree-trunk. "One, drunk on devil-bark? A child could kill him."

The spearman's face clouded like that of a boy who, expecting praise, has been ridiculed. But he answered quietly:

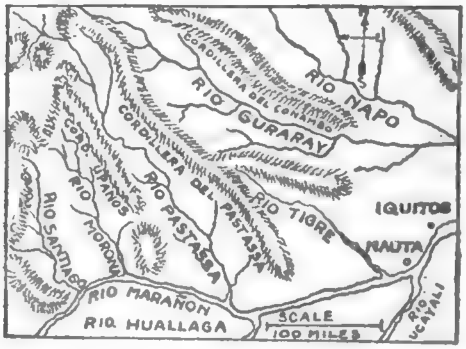
"All, king. But Jivero is Jivero."

"Hah! Well said!" José approved. "A Jivero is a Jivero, and we spare none. And, *por Dios*, he was not so drunk—he stood and would fight, hah? And you nailed him up. A good cast, *hombre!* No accursed shrinker of heads escapes from a White One!"

Now the spearman grinned proudly as he turned to withdraw his weapon from the grip of the wood. In the faces of the other light-skinned warriors his pride was mirrored. Had not this king of theirs, in praising him, praised them also? It was so. All eyes centered on the sinewy white, who looked back at them with half-affectionate, half-sardonic approbation.

A formidable array they made, those jungle men, though not many of them could press into the small open space. Every one of them, from clean-cut hair to ground-gripping toes, was a natural athlete; lithe-muscled, firm-jawed, steady-eyed, poised with the ready ease born of alert strength. And if their vigorous physiques alone had not warned of their fighting power, their weapons would have made the most truculent antagonists wary. Strong bows and big quivers of war-arrows, heavy hardwood clubs, short throwing-spears and longer *lanzas*—these, deadly enough in themselves, were not all. Every second man wore, slung under the left arm by a diagonal bark-strip from the right shoulder, a keen machete. Every third man carried in the same fashion a hide cartridge-pouch, and in his right hand was a big-bored carbine.

The longest gun in the little army was that of the sun-bronzed white man, little whiter than themselves. A full-sized, full-magazined repeater, this was, and battered and worn as if by long service; in fact, it looked much older than the carbines, which also showed signs of considerable use. It hung in its owner's fist as if it were an integral part of his arm; a deadly appendage which had been there for years, and without which he would feel crippled. If he was truly a king, he was a fighting ruler. And, king or not, there could be no doubt that he had long been a jungle denizen. His clothing proved that.



Unlike his men, he wore shirt, belt, and bagged trousers. But the garments had never been fashioned in a town, nor had the cloth been woven from threads of cotton or wool. It was made from *llanchama* tree-bark and dyed purplish-red with *achote*, as were the clouts of his followers; and the belt was no leather strap, but a braid of palm-fiber cords. He had neither hat nor boots. Utterly devoid of all insignia of regal rank—without even a crown of feathers—this must be a poor king.

Yet his next movement showed him to be an overlord. He lifted an imperious hand, and out from the surrounding knot of men stepped one whose bearing proclaimed him a chief; an older man than the Spaniard, yet one whose eyes showed calm respect for his junior. He halted and waited.

"We are near," asserted he of the hawk face. "This Jivero would not go far to take his drink."

The Indian nodded as if hearing something most obvious. He glanced up at a slanting sun-ray; followed it down to where it rested on the trunk of a young tree; moved to it, laid a thumb on its upper edge; measured off a short space on the bark above it with a finger; looked steadily at his commander.

"A short half-hour," the latter translated. "*Bueno!* Then more Jiveros go howling to ——! Look now to the guns, *capitán*."

The chief turned and growled something at the gun-bearers. Each levered his breech-bolt partly back, peered within the magazine at the ready top cartridge, clicked his gun shut. From farther back in the bush, like soft echoes, sounded the subdued clatter of other rifles opening and closing in the hands of unseen men.

The spearman, who now had retrieved his wet javelin from the tree, walked stolidly past the Spaniard. The latter slapped him lightly on a bare shoulder.

"Good scouting!" he approved. "You shall go on, flanking as before."

The scout's chest swelled and his eyes gleamed again, but he spoke no word. Into the green tangle he slipped soft-footed. The others, with a final glance at the body huddled where it had dropped from the tree, fell into file and moved back into the labyrinth. In a few minutes only the Spaniard was left, gazing hard-faced at the thing his flanker had speared.

"Hah!" he chuckled mirthlessly. "While you talked with your devil of death he let death come to you! Even a Jivero could laugh at that joke. I will tell your friends, if any still live after I— *Por Dios!* What is that?"

Muffled by the intervening jungle, from somewhere off at the left broke three gunshots. The listening man's face twisted in sudden rage. He leaped forward.

"The fools! Some have gone on and opened fire——"

Three more explosions sounded in a swift rip. The infuriated commander halted as if petrified.

"But no! Those are not our guns! Neither are they Jivero muskets——"

The staccato reports burst into a ragged but steady crackle. With them merged a few dull black-powder barks and a noise like a savage chorus of hate.

"*Madre de Dios!* Those are high-powered rifles! White men fight there!"

A headlong crash into the bush, and he was gone.

CHAPTER II

FIGHTERS THREE

BACK to back, crouching between a couple of robust trees and facing outward, three white men fought doggedly and desperately against foes half-seen amid the encompassing screen of leaves.

They had poor targets—a bare brown arm hurling a spear; a glimmer of steel as a muzzle-loading rifle slid around a tree-trunk; an arrow streaking from a clump of broad-leaved plantain; a dodging movement among a tangle of lianas. But they were taking heavy toll. Though badly outnumbered and totally surrounded, they shot with the grim coolness of veterans and the deadly accuracy of expert gunmen; and at every crack of their bolt-action rifles something fell heavily in the bushes. Each was shooting back and forth along the arc before him, and the three arcs combined to form a circle of leaden death.

But the bullet-riddled enemy yielded no ground. The jungle seemed spawning fresh warriors to replace the fallen. New spears swished out of the green, new arrows whirred, new poisoned darts snicked into the leaves, new yells of ferocity blended with the occasional *whang* of a musket. The trees between which the fighting trio had taken cover were furred with missiles. The fern-foliage around them was drooping in torn tatters. The broad hats had been struck from their heads, revealing three shades of hair—black, blond, and vivid red. And out from the black beard masking the jaw of the tallest oozed a trickle of wet crimson.

"Cripes!" gritted the red-headed one, rapidly reloading his piece. "Got to dig up more shells, looey! I'm most shot out. How ye fixed?"

"Same way," clipped the blond, firing

as he spoke. "No time to open a can—" *Crack!* "—use your side-arm!" *Crack!*

"Yeah! Git back there, ye dirty ——!"

A shot terminated his growl. A fierce face toppled back and was gone.

"Ouch! Gun's red-hot!" complained the red man, meanwhile shifting his muzzle toward a disturbed bush-clump. "Where'n ——'s all these guys come from?"

He shot again. The bush shook violently, then stood still, a motionless bare foot protruding from its base.

"That's just where they come from, Tim," dryly answered the black-bearded man, reloading in his turn. "Merry! Nail this fellow, quick!"

He ducked as he spoke. A spear hurtled through the space where his face had been. The blond, obeying his order, snapped a bullet into a momentarily revealed coppery chest. Another savage collapsed.

As the black-beard threw his refilled gun to his shoulder, a shrill yell from the outer bush rose high over the other battle-howls. Another joined it, and another. Then out broke a volume of ferocious shouts almost drowning the previous uproar.

The tight-set jaws of the beleaguered three clamped harder. Through his teeth red Tim grated:

"Here's where we git it! They got reinforcements. We ain't got a chance."

"Carry on!" snapped the black-beard.

"Aw, sure." Tim's gun spoke twice. "Till we're clean snowed under. That won't be long— Huh! My gosh, cap, listen!"

Through the hullabaloo beyond them smashed new gun-shots. Rapidly they increased in speed and volume.

"Repeaters!" shouted the blond man. "Repeating rifles—forty-fours—a young army of them!"

As he spoke, the rain of missiles pouring at them dwindled and died. The assailants too were listening to the advancing roar of gun-fire. For a moment the three white men poised like statues, their eyes widening in astonished half-hope. Repeating rifles, fast coming nearer—could they possibly be guns of rescue?

"Nope!" Tim answered the unspoken question. "This ain't our lucky day, and we ain't got no friends anyways. Whoever's comin' will jump us jest the same as these guys. Look out! They're goin' to mop up!"

As if aroused by his gruff voice, the savages charged.

Like leaping demons they came, reckless of the bullets which instantly tore into them. Over falling bodies bounded fiend-faced men with spear and club, determined to overwhelm and annihilate the dauntless but pitifully small knot of whites. Some of these also fell; others closed in.

Up rose the three, dropping rifles but drawing flat pistols. Still back to back, they hurled a terrific fire into the naked chests swarming at them—twenty-one crashing reports merging into one ripping roar. The ground around them became a shambles.

Jamming together as they converged on their prey, the Indians fell before those devastating pistols as if collectively struck down by a thunderbolt. Around the two arrow-studded trees rose a thigh-deep ring of dead. Upon it slipped and sprawled unwounded aborigines unable to hold a footing. Beyond it others halted, appalled and hesitating. In that second of respite the trio of die-hards whipped fresh clips from their belts and reloaded. And beyond them the ragged bang of the repeaters steadily came nearer.

Out crashed the pistol chorus again. The naked brutes rising on the heaped bodies flopped down and stayed down. Those just beyond, flinching, falling, turned to flee. Shot in the back, half a score of them failed to reach cover. The remainder hurled themselves into the thicket and were gone.

"Wow! Hot dog!" Tim yelled hoarsely, his blue eyes darting all about. "They've took it on the run. Now, who's these other guys?"

The approaching force was not yet in sight, but it was coming faster and evidently sweeping all before it. The black-beard threw up his head and hurled a booming question into the red-spattered green:

"*Hola! Quién es?*"

Back came the answer in a piercing yell which carried like a bugle-call.

"José Martinez, *rey de Los Blancos!** *Quién es usted?*"

The three stood as if struck dumb. Slowly their heads turned, and they stared into one another's eyes. The firing had diminished to occasional scattered shots. From near at hand came sudden splashes, earthy thumps, rushing sounds among leaves, grunts and snarls of grappling antagonists. But within eyeshot of the two trees no man moved.

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*"King of the White Ones."

"Cr-r-ripes!" marveled Tim. "Hozy Marteeny, our ol' buddy! Wha'd'ye know!"

"*Quién es?*" came the sharp reiteration.

The tallest, his bleak face suddenly aglow, shouted back:

"McKay! Knowlton! Ryan! Over here!"

"*Quién? Válgame Dios!* My old comrades!" sounded an exultant yell.

Running feet padded. Then into the sight of the gun-fighters loped the Spaniard whose scout had speared the head-hunter.

To the eyes of strangers that figure erupting from the jungle would have been as grisly as that of a buccaneer attacking a town of the Spanish Main. Hair and mustachios abristle, face aflame with battle-lust, shirt and hairy chest splashed with sinister stains, heavy gun gripped in one fist and red-smeared machete in the other, he made a dire picture; and the appearance of the half-dozen followers who broke cover at his heels was hardly such as to inspire confidence in him or his intentions. Indians all, armed with spear and rifle, smeared with the blood of foemen or dripping from unheeded wounds of their own, hard-jawed and slit-eyed, they came on like merciless messengers of massacre. But at sight of those grim fighters the waiting trio broke into a roar of welcome.

"Hah! *Es verdad!* It is true!" yelled José, his teeth flashing. "My *compañeros* of the days gone by! *Bienvenido, camaradas*—welcome back! *Sangre de Cristo!* What a killing you have made here!"

THE HALTED outside the ring of dead, viewing in one astounded sweep of the eyes the execution done by the pistols. The Indians at his heels also stopped, staring first at the slain, then at the three between the trees, then around as if seeking more white men. Finding none, they muttered to one another and gazed wide-eyed at the gunmen who had wrought such havoc.

"Yeah! And now ye come hornin' in and bustin' up the game!" snorted Tim, his wide grin contradicting his growling tone. "Why didn't ye lay off a li'l longer, ye ol' crape-hanger, and leave us clean up right?"

He clambered across the human barrier as he spoke, right hand outstretched. Dropping his gun, José darted his own right forward. Palm slapped palm and fists closed in bone-crunching grips of amity.

"Pardon, Señor Tim," laughed the rescuer. "But I did not know who you were, and my men must have exercise. Now that I have spoiled your game you can join in mine, if you like—I am on my way to play with some Jiveros just beyond here. Ah, Capitán McKay!"

Wrenching his hand loose, he proffered it to the tall man, who now had come out and was standing with soldierly erectness. A quick, hearty handshake, a tight-lipped smile, and Captain McKay turned away unspeaking, his gray eyes searching the jungle and his pistol ready. The blond, slender Knowlton was the next and last to seize the powder-smutted hand of the "King of the White Ones."

"José, you're the toughest-looking angel I ever clapped an eye on," he declared, "but you're an angel just the same. We were about shot out."

"You are the first who ever called me so sweet a name, *teniente*," grinned the other. "But you mean you have no more cartridges? That is bad."

"No—we have some—didn't have time to open up the reserve. Got some here in a can—others in a cache up the Pastasa——"

"You came down the Pastasa? *Nombre de Dios!* That is a journey for men! But where are your packers? Killed?"

"Here's hopin' they are!" Tim broke in vengefully. "They turned yeller—quit us cold, away up-stream!"

"Ah," nodded José. "The old story. But come, I must move. Open your can quickly. Leave all else here. My men will return later."

The talk had been swift, each man keeping an ear open toward the fight, which seemed to be receding. Now Tim lunged over the barrier, shoved a couple of dead Jiveros aside, and lifted from the ground a heavy pack. Rapidly unstrapping it, he drew out a gallon kerosene tin, soldered air-tight, which he attacked with a machete, rising soon with hands full of flat pasteboard cartridge-boxes. Meanwhile José gave curt commands in some Indian tongue to the waiting half-dozen aborigines, who glanced at Tim's pack and at two others half-buried between the trees, then nodded.

"Here y' are, cap and looey."

Tim cast his handful of boxes at the pair beyond, stooped, lifted the can and its remaining contents, and pitched it also at their feet. Gathering up the rifles, he floundered over to them. With fast-working fingers all reloaded their guns and replenished their depleted ammunition-belts. The extra cartridges then remaining went into pockets.

"All set. Where do we go from here?" demanded the florid Irishman.

"Follow," curtly answered José, gun again in hand.

At once he was off, his Indians close at his heels as before. The Americans loped in the rear, twitching their heavy belts to rest more comfortably across the hips.

Through the bewildering maze of buttressed trees, dangling *bejucos* and spreading fronds the short column advanced at its best speed; now swerving around a tree-butt, now hurdling a log, now stumbling over a contorted body nearly hidden in the undergrowth. The area of bullet-shredded leaves was left behind, but new corpses were met at frequent intervals—usually those of black-toothed Jiveros, but now and then that of a lighter-colored man of the jungle.

The fight had swept on in a series of individual combats among the forest ambushes, and now it was centering on some place close ahead. Gun-fire sounded, but only in infrequent shots punctuating a snarling rumble of voices—an inarticulate dissonance heavy with hatred. The enemy, scattered at first by the unexpected onslaught of José and his men, evidently had now drawn together and made a stand.

And so it proved. Suddenly the little column emerged into a clearing, in the middle of which stood a big pole-walled, palm-thatched house. Around this house raged a lethal mêlée. Here and there among the charred stumps studding the open space, light men and brown men grappled in small knots, stabbing, throttling, tumbling close-locked on the ground; but the main fight was along the walls of the tribal domicile. Clubs rose and battered down; red-dripping spears flew; machetes gleamed as their owners thrust, dodged, slashed; rifles and muskets bludgeoned out brains or belched a few bullets at close range. The place was a whirlpool of battling naked men.

"*Bueno!*" exulted José, after a keen look. "Aillu has not forgotten his plan, in spite of our fight back in the bush. He is a good *capitán*. Friend Tim, have you tobacco? I would smoke."

The Americans, seeking the best point to throw themselves into the fray, turned on him in astonishment. After his dash to reach the fight, he now stood like a mere spectator.

"What's stoppin' ye? Cold feet?" demanded the outspoken Tim.

José guffawed.

"Not so. My feet are most warm. But we are not needed there. My men can handle the little matter—and, as I said, I would smoke."

He motioned to the six Indians who had attended him unceasingly, and who now stood tense as chained dogs. The movement was only a wave of the hand toward the fight, but the warriors grinned as if given priceless rewards. With a simultaneous leap they sprinted toward their foes, howling like wolves as they sped. A moment later they were merged in the mass.

The three partners hesitated, watched the combat a moment longer, then relaxed. José had spoken truth. His followers had the upper hand. They had herded the Jiveros back against their own walls and were steadily cutting them down.

"Marvel of marvels! José Martinez neglecting a chance to fight!" said Knowlton, fishing a tobacco-pouch from a pocket and proffering it. "Never thought I'd live to see that. How come?"

"I have learned wisdom in my old age," chuckled the other. "I am not now José Martinez, Peruvian outlaw and lone bush-tramp, with only myself to think of when I fight. I am *El Rey*—King José, ruler of the White Ones of No Man's Land—and I must stand off and watch while my captains battle."

"Faith, ye look it, I don't think!" rumbled Tim. "Blood from hair to belt, ye are, and yer toad-stabber there is covered with it. Stand off and watch—huh! But what's this king stuff? Straight goods?"

"I am the king," was the simple answer. Then, with a grin—

"And yet I have not a match, and without a match I do not smoke."

McKay, without taking his eyes from the fighting, passed over a little box of matches. José, igniting the tobacco which he had rolled in a thin slip of bark, took a lungful of smoke and exhaled rapturously. For all his nonchalance, however, he was watching the mêlée like a cat.

For a few minutes nobody spoke. The struggling Indians heaved and struck, pitched outward or collapsed; the brown ones became fewer; the growling mob-voice gradually diminished. At length the light warriors began walking about in little knots, some limping, all looking for survivors to dispatch. Around the pole walls settled a quiet broken only by short questions and answers among the victors.

"An easy victory," coolly said King José. "I came with men enough to wipe out this whole nest of *salvajes*, but you had killed many before we arrived. That *capitán* Aillu of mine has a trick of surrounding which seldom fails—to attack with part of his men in front, more on the sides to close in behind——"

"An encircling movement," nodded McKay. "Good stuff if you have enough men. And those men of yours are bear-cats."

The Spaniard's eyes glowed.

"They are men," he asserted. "But come, let us enter our captured city and take our spoils—the heads and the women."

He began moving toward the house.

"Heads? Women?" ejaculated Knowlton. "Good Lord! You haven't taken up Jivero tricks, have you?"

The other gave him a quick glance, then smiled a hard smile.

"Come, *señores;* and you shall see," was his answer.

Looking queerly at him, the three silently followed.

CHAPTER III

MISSING

WITHIN the long house where, a few hours previously, the daily routine of a Jivero community had moved in its usual deliberate course, alien conquerors now rested after battle. Jiveros still were there, but they squatted in dumb submission, apparently apathetic regarding their fate. They were women and children. No male Jivero of fighting age remained alive.

In the middle of the big room three North Americans and a Spaniard sat side by side on a wide couch of bamboo strips, puffing at cigarets and scowling at a tall roof-pole. From that pole, hanging by long locks of hair, dangled a score of human heads.

They were not such heads, however, as one might perhaps expect to see immediately after a no-quarter fight between savage tribes; not freshly severed trophies of victory. There had been no mutilation of their fallen enemies by the White Ones of José. These horrid things were the handiwork of the men who now lay dead outside—of the Jiveros themselves.

Once they had been the heads of crafty creatures which prowled the vast wilderness of El Oriente; they had scowled, laughed, yawned, torn asunder with filed teeth the flesh of bird or beast; they had held the brains directing the movements of the strong bodies beneath. Now they were uncanny masks, no larger than apples, their tiny eyes shut, their lips sewed with cotton cords which hung down like grisly white beards. Within them were no tongues, no brains, no skulls. Little leering faces and hanks of hair—nothing more.

Somberly regarding them, the red and the blond man twitched their shoulders as if chilly. The faces of the two tall black-haired men were unreadable.

"Urrrgh!" muttered Tim. "If ye hadn't come 'long when ye did, Hozy, we might have looked like these things in—how long's it take?"

"About forty-eight hours, I think," answered José, without looking at him. "The skull is taken out by slitting the scalp from neck to crown, and then the skin is sewed up and put into a cone-shaped pot of water. The water is heated almost to boiling, so that the head will cook without scalding. Then hot sand is put in at the neck-hole, and at the same time the outside is rubbed with smooth hot stones. As soon as the sand cools, more hot sand is put in. And so it goes on, the sanding and the smoothing and moving the head about, until it is shrunk evenly to the smallest size. Then it is smoked, and it is done. The *diablos!* A million curses on all their race!"

He sprang up suddenly, hurling his cigaret to the ground. With long, swift strides he paced up and down, watched intently by his own men, his newly arrived friends, and his prisoners. After a few minutes he sat down as abruptly as he had risen.

"Got some friends of yours, maybe?" suggested Knowlton.

"*Sí!* One friend who——"

His teeth clicked shut. Presently he went on:

"But no more of that now. Aillu! Curac!"

From the ranks of the men resting on the beds of their late foes, dressing wounds or talking quietly among themselves, came two soft-striding warriors of muscular build and mature years. One was the chief with whom José had conversed during the halt at the tree of the devil-dreamer—a gaunt-cheeked, hard-jawed, deep-eyed man; the other, more chunky of build and broad of face, with a wide mouth lifted into a perpetual half-smile by a long scar down one cheek.

"Aillu, chief of the White Ones of the Curaray side of my cordillera," explained José, nodding toward the first, "and Curac, leader of Los Blancos of the Pastasa side. Each is a *capitán*, and a good one."

With no change of tone, he spoke briefly in the Indian tongue. Aillu returned to his men. Curac monotoned a dozen words, and a dozen fighters arose with spears in hand and went out. Curac himself advanced on the prisoners and grunted a few times. Women and children arose, filed through a small doorway in a partition of *cana brava* behind them, and shut the door.

"The men of Curac guard the outer door of the women's quarters until midnight," José went on. "Then the men of Aillu relieve them. In the morning we all march, and this place goes up in smoke."

"What about the women?" curtly asked McKay.

The Spaniard smiled grimly.

"The women trouble you, yes? Learn, then, that they go to a better life than they have ever known. They go as slaves, but they never have been anything else——"

"As slaves of whom?" McKay persisted.

"Of me and my people, *capitán*. And now that I think of it, I must no longer call you *capitán*—I use that name for Aillu and Curac and others. Did not the Señor Knowlton call you 'Rod' in other days?"

"Yes. Name's Roderick McKay."

"Rod — Rodereeck — Rodrigo. Señor Rodrigo it shall be."

"Omit the *señor*."

"As you say," laughed José. "But the women—they have been only slaves to murderers. Perhaps you do not know the Jivero wife-custom? When a girl becomes of the mating age—that is to say, about twelve years—her father gives her as wife to some friend or makes some young man work several months for her. But the man who first gets her may not live long. If he has two or three strong, good-looking wives, some other Jivero kills him—yes, even one of his own neighbors, perhaps. Then the women are those of the new man until he also is killed. By the time she is old, a woman may belong to six or more killers in turn, and see the heads of her dead mates shrunken like these."

He gestured toward the dangling masks.

"Perhaps, since she has no love for her master in the beginning, she is glad to exchange him for a new one now and then," he added, with a slight grin. "But, whether she likes him or not, she is only a slave."

"So you keep her a slave," said Knowlton.

His tone was matter-of-fact, but in it the other detected a caustic undernote which made him glance sidelong at the clear-cut blond profile.

"Just so, *señor*," was the cool rejoinder. "What else? Should I slaughter these women? Or turn them into the jungle to die? Or, perhaps, carry them to other Jiveros and say, 'Here are new slaves for you—make them breed more murderous shrinkers of heads to destroy me and my White Ones'? Hah! Not I!"

Knowlton flushed slightly, drew the last puff from his cigaret, and dropped the butt. Without reply, he ran his eyes again over the heads.

"Wal, say, Hozy," interposed Tim, "mebbe ye're right, at that, though I don't mind tellin' ye this slave stuff o' yourn don't make no big hit with us. But about these here, now, Jivero heads—there ain't no more round the house nowheres?"

"These are all, Señor Tim. My men brought to this pole all they found. They are not in the habit of overlooking anything."

"What about them bark baskits hangin' off the poles up above? What's in them?"

"Food, hung up to protect it from ants and other crawling things."

"Oh. And ye say these shrunk-up heads are like life? Ye could reckernize a feller ye knowed?"

"You have said it."

The three American faces relaxed a little. Tim took a long breath.

"Good 'nough. There ain't no white man's head here, then. Le's lookit somethin' else a while. Say, these are a funny kind o' bunks, now, ain't they? I thought everybody round here slept in hammicks.

Bet ye could sleep three men easy in every bunk."

The others cast perfunctory glances at the couch on which they sat—a lattice-work of bamboo strips and interlaced cords, within a pole frame.

"Six or more," corrected José. "They sleep in a row, with feet on that pole rail out there, and a smoky fire under the legs to keep off the mosquitoes. You spoke of a white man's head, *amigo*. Did you expect to find one here?"

"Wal, no—we was afraid we might, that's all. We hope we don't find it in no such place as this here, but we—uh—we're lookin' round. It's Dave Rand. Ye remember him."

THERE was a silence. Thoughtfully José picked up Knowlton's tobacco-pouch, lying beside him, and made a new cigaret. For a time he puffed at it with-out speaking.

"Rand," he mused at length. "Rand, your friend and mine. I have not forgotten.

"It was he who first brought you three into this part of the world. He had disappeared while traveling in Brazil, and you three came to find him. And you found him alive, but crazed by a bullet, among the cannibals of the Rio Javary, in Brazil. And you cured his craziness by hitting him over the head with a gun— Hah! many a time I have thought about that—and then we four brought him out to the Amazon, and you sailed away.

"And then, a year later, the four of you came back to hunt gold. And I chanced to meet you at the mouth of the Tigre Yacu, where I too was bound on a gold-hunt. And we went into the Cordillera del Pastasa and found our treasure. But it took a *temblor*—an earthquake—to reveal it and to help us kill the Jiveros who had swarmed in to take our heads. And Señor Dave, always silent, but always seeing everything—how he fought those accursed ones! He was caught among falling stones, too, and lived only by a miracle of luck. Has his luck failed, now that he has made a fortune?"

He flashed a glance at the others, then looked at his cigaret.

"We're afraid so, José," Knowlton admitted. "It's like this:

"We four got home all right, and after we whacked up our fortune into four equal parts we sort of scattered. Each of us had a different idea about what he wanted to do, and so each went his own way for a while, though we kept more or less in touch with one another. Rod here has some relatives in Scotland, so he went over to visit them and then drifted down into Africa a while. I wanted to see some of the big outdoor parts of the States and Canada where I hadn't been, and I rambled all around seeing them. Tim wanted to stay in New York, so he stayed, and hit a little hard luck. And while we——"

"Aw, tell it right," morosely interjected Tim. "Hard luck? I was jest a dumb fool. I got an idee, Hozy, I was goin' to be a fynanseer—a guy that invests his dough in stocks and bonds and such-like and makes a lot more money and gits to be a wallopin' big toad all round. And I went down in Wall Street and bought, and made some profit, and bought some more, and got real int'rested in the game. And then a guy that had been steerin' me round says, why am I satisfied with small stuff—why not git into the game right and be a broker, with him for a pardner, me puttin' up the dough and him runnin' the works, seein' he knowed the game better'n I did. And I fell for it. And it run along and things was goin' swell, and then the bottom dropped out and he dropped out with it, and they ain't found him yet. It was some pardnership, I'll say—he was the broker and I was the broke."

José stared in a puzzled way. McKay, eyes twinkling, enlightened him.

"Tim gambled and lost."

"Oh. A-ha! A North American gambling game, yes? I do not know that game. And the other man cheated?"

"I'll say so! 'Tain't so much losin' yer money that hurts—it's bein' played for a sucker and knowin' ye been rooked, and bein' give the razz by everybody that's been tumblin' over themselves to be friends with ye. One day ye're "Mister Ryan, sir,' and the next ye're 'that thick mick.' Aw wal, it's all in the game, I s'pose. But if I ever git holt o' that pardner o' mine——"

He paused, his big hands curling into fists and his mouth becoming a thin line. José nodded and significantly slipped a finger across his jugular.

"Aw, no. Ye can't do it that way up there. Ye git sent to the chair if ye do, no matter how ornery the guy was. But

I'll jest show the gent a few li'l' tricks I learnt while we was buckin' the Hindenburg line in France. Grrrumph!"

With an inarticulate growl he subsided.

Presently Knowlton resumed his interrupted narrative.

"Well, as I was saying, while we were enjoying ourselves in our various ways Dave was doing likewise, only in a different manner. He'd traveled so much in his younger days that he didn't care about drifting around, so he stayed in New York. He got in with some scientific societies, and he wrote a number of articles that created quite a commotion in those circles; facts about the South American Indians that nobody knew before, and about the psychological effects of jungle life on civilized man, and such things. And then he developed a hobby for ethnology—the study of human races and their customs, you know. That led him into the question of how these Jiveros shrink their heads, and why they shrink them, and who the Jiveros really are, and so on.

"Something about those things is known in the States—some of these shrunken heads are in a museum in New York, along with a couple made by the Mundurucu Indians of the Rio Tapajoz, in Brazil, down the Amazon; the Mundurucu heads are not so good, by the way. But there's a great deal more that isn't known, and there's even some dispute as to how the shrinking is done. The upshot of all this was that Dave decided to come in here and see for himself."

José slowly, silently shook his head.

"That's what we're afraid of, too," nodded Knowlton. "That he'll never come back. He's been gone a year now. He didn't let us know—just packed up and went, according to that quiet habit of his. We were drifting around, as I've said, and we didn't get together again until about three months ago. Then, when we tried to locate Dave for a little reunion dinner, we learned of what he'd done. We talked it over, and—here we are."

Again José contemplated his cigaret, which had gone out.

"I see," he said after a pause. "Where was Señor Dave last seen?"

"At Ambato. He came in from the Pacific side, via Guayaquil. We followed the same route and found officials who remembered he had started down the Pastasa. Neither he nor his Quichua packers have come back. So we came down the Pastasa too."

"And how did you reach this place?"

"Here? Well, we railed it to Pelileo, end of the line; horsed it along the Pastasa cañon nearly to Mera; legged it along the Puyo trail to Canelos, on the Rio Bobonaza. Couldn't go straight down the Pastasa from Mera, of course, because nothing can go through the rapids there and live; so we had to make the detour via Canelos. Canelos is controled by priests, and because we didn't choose to tell all our business they decided we were gold-hunters and made things hard. Our Quichua packers quit us there in the night, and the *padres* blocked us from getting any local Indians. The only way we could even get a canoe was by seizing one. Had too much duffle, so we cached everything we couldn't pack ourselves—left it on a hill-top about a day below Canelos. Then we came down the Bobonaza to the Pastasa.

"Well, we'd heard that at the mouth of the Bobonaza was a *varadero*—a portage-trail—that ran across to the Curaray. We didn't know whether you were still around here or not, but we figured that if you were you'd be up along the Cordillera del Pastasa somewhere and we might find you by taking that trail; so we looked for it. But we didn't find it. Is there one?"

"*Sí*. But unless one knows just where to look for it he may pass it twenty times without seeing it."

"Well, we missed it. So then we figured our best bet would be to cut west instead of east and try to hit the pueblo of Macas, on the Morona. The Riobamba folks told us some of the Jiveros sometimes traded at Macas, and that seemed likely to be the best place to get a line on Dave. As near as we could figure it out from the rotten map we've got, it was about a hundred miles air-line to the *pueblo*—meaning two hundred, the way you have to worm around down here. So we bucked into the bush yesterday morning, heading due west by compass. Then this afternoon we ran plumb into this Jivero gang. You know the rest."

His matter-of-fact recital brought an appreciative grin to the brooding face of the jungle-roving commander of Los Blancos.

"You speak of it as nothing," he chuckled. "Few men would have dared to come on after being deserted by their Indians—few would have dared even to start down the Pastasa! And of those few almost none would have attempted to cross this Cordillera de Upanòs into the Morona country, where *los infieles* let no man pass. That town of Macas, of which you speak—just across the river from that place, three hundred years ago, was the fine Spanish city of Sevilla de Oro. What is Sevilla de Oro now? A name—a tale—nothing more! The Jiveros stormed it—destroyed it and all its men—carried away the wives and babes of those Spaniards and made Jiveros of them. And from that day to this no white man may pass through the country of the rivers Morona or Santiago or Pastasa. You know it well. Yet you try to do that which cannot be done—for nothing but to find a lost comrade."

"Well, we told you when we last saw you that we might come back some day looking for excitement," the blond man hastily retorted, as if not relishing an accusation of sentiment. "Life up home is so blooming civilized and law-ridden that it palls on a fellow sometimes."

"But you would not have come unless Señor Dave had come."

"Maybe not. Not just now, anyhow. You've heard nothing about him?"

José did not answer at once. Then his reply was—

"I have not once heard his name since he and you left me on the Tigre Yacu."

With that he abruptly arose, and as abruptly changed the subject.

"I have hunger. Let us eat of the food which our Jivero hosts so kindly gathered for us. Curac!"

Curac came, received orders, went to the women's door, and threw it open. In response to his gruff grunts women stolidly entered, freshened fires, and began preparing meals from the contents of the rafter-hung baskets.

At that moment one of the guards came through the outer doorway and cat-footed up to his commander-in-chief. A few words passed. Then, preceded by the warrior, José went outside.

The eyes of the Americans dwelt for a grave interval on the little heads which had once been those of men; then they turned to one another.

"Hozy acts funny. Dang funny!" rumbled Tim.

Short nods agreed. Then all stared again at the heads.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRIESTESS OF PIATZO

BEFORE the silent three loomed a spear-bearing warrior; a tall young fellow who spoke no word, but whose clear eyes looked steadily into theirs. McKay lifted his brows. With a wave of the free hand, the newcomer gestured toward the entrance.

"*El rey?*" queried Knowlton.

A nod was the answer. Without waiting, the man turned and swung doorward. The Americans rose and followed him.

Down one wall the guide led them, halting at a doorway before which stood the guards watching the women. There, without entering, he gestured toward the interior. The three glanced inside, saw only dimness, and looked back at the Indian in some perplexity. Again he motioned them within.

"Looks as if we were invited into the harem," commented Knowlton. "Here goes, anyway."

And he sauntered through the small opening. At once, from somewhere beyond, sounded the voice of José.

"Enter, comrades. The fool should have brought you through the partition, instead of around the house; but an Indian follows his habits unless told otherwise. Come and see a Jivero prize more handsome than those devil-heads."

Trooping inward, they saw him standing near a tiny fire. Beyond, statesque and still, stood a woman alone. Farther back, sullenly silent, was gathered a group of Jivero women, snakily watching the pair near the fire.

"Wow! Some pippin!" muttered Tim, as his eyes adjusted themselves to the subdued light. "Leave it to Hozy to find gold in a mud-hole! He never misses."

By comparison with the others of her sex, the lone woman, softly illumined by the fire-glow, seemed fair indeed. Not only was she far lighter than they, but her oval face was more clear-cut and much more intelligent than their heavy visages. Her figure, too, though partly concealed by a simple sleeveless gown caught together over the right shoulder, was taller and more slender than their stocky frames. In her poise was an unconscious dignity, a suggestion of self-reliance and aloofness, markedly at variance with the slouching attitudes of the unkempt females behind her. This was no stolid Jivero woman, accustomed since girlhood to being merely the creature of one murderer after another.

As the battle-stained North Americans paused beside José and stared at her, she glanced from man to man with a swift sweep of the eyes that seemed to see all. A fleeting gleam of interest lit up her face and was as quickly gone. Then her dark eyes dwelt again on José; and, with the same calm poise, she seemed to await speech.

"More of the spoils of war, king?" dryly asked Knowlton.

"Something of the sort," nodded José. "A most unexpected treasure to find in such a place as this, yes? And now that we have her, what shall we do with her? It is a pity that I already have nine wives, who probably would kill her if I made her the tenth—for she is not of their family or their tribe, and they are jealous of outsiders. But you, my friends, have not even one wife among you. Shall I present her to you? Or will you draw lots to see who shall have her?"

McKay frowned slightly. Knowlton, after a quizzical glance, smiled as if at an obvious jest. Tim alone felt called on to answer:

"If we didn't know ye so well, ye danged ol' pirate, we might think ye meant it. And ye know us well enough to know we fight shy o' women. Women was only invented to git men into trouble, anyways, and us three can find plenty o' trouble without help. But say, this here li'l lady is sure easy to look at. If she ain't white, she's so near it I can't see the difference. Who is she?"

"She says her name is Nuné, and that she is Indian. Yet she speaks Spanish very well, and I think her blood is nearly pure Spanish. She is a prisoner, just brought from the country of the Huambizas, away to the southeast, where a war-party from this place has just been on a raid. The Huambizas, as you perhaps know, are the fiercest tribe of all the Jivero nation, and the men from here had bad fortune in attacking them—they brought back only three heads and this one woman.

"That may be the reason why they were so vicious in fighting you today, though no Jivero needs a reason to be murder-mad. I have learned nothing more from her—she thinks before she speaks, and then says little. But later she will find time to talk. She marches with us tomorrow, like the rest."

To the woman he said:

"Stay here. Do not try to escape in the night. My men watch."

She made no reply; only regarded him steadily. He turned and walked toward the partition. Tim and Knowlton lounged after him. Then McKay spoke—

"Better separate her from the other women for the night, José."

The Spaniard whirled, shot a glance at the tall Scot, and followed his gaze to the Jivero women. Their lowering expressions boded no good.

"Ah! *Sí*, I think you have it right. Before morning she might become silent forever. Nuné! *Aquí!*"

At his imperative gesture she moved obediently forward—still mute, still regarding her new masters with unperturbed serenity, and seeming to glide rather than to walk. The Jivero women, standing like wooden figures, watched in sour silence. José resumed his way doorward, the girl drifting behind him with the same smooth grace. The North Americans trailed after her.

"Gee, there's real class to the kid," Tim admired. "Git the set o' that head, will ye? Carries herself like a million dollars. I've seen many a dame on Fifth Av'noo that could take lessons in walkin' from this here li'l wild woman. Wha'd ye say her name was, kink? Noony?"

The girl's head turned, and her deep eyes looked inquiringly into Tim's blue ones. Those Irish eyes twinkled straight back at her, and on the wide red-bearded mouth grew a contagious smile. For an instant she seemed to search his mind. Then a tiny smile flitted across her own lips, and she faced forward again.

"Nuné," corrected José, without glancing back.

"Noonay? Noonay. Kind o' musical, at that. I like it."

"He's off again, Rod," Knowlton muttered, with pretended secrecy. "After those wise cracks he just made about women, one smiles at him and he falls like a ton of coal."

"Grrrumph!" responded Tim. "Don't git jealous, looey. Mebbe she'll smile at you too, bimeby. And about them wise cracks—

I've took another look since then. And about me fallin'—I've fell before, but I always lit on me feet."

Wherewith he drowned all retorts by howling at the top of his voice:

"Me wi-yuld I-yuh-rish ro-hose!
The swee-test flow'r that gro-hows!
Ye kin search ev'ry-whay-uhr
But none kin com-pay-uhr
With me wi-i-i——"

"Ugh! Glug-glug-oof!"

The bawl was cut short by Knowlton's arm, thrust under the songster's jaw and clamped tight with choking force. Gurgling, wheezing, Tim lurched through the doorway into the men's room, trying to heave his blond partner over his head. Failing, he clutched the strangling forearm with both big fists and wrenched it away.

"Let the rest of it die, or else take it out and sing it to the other howling monkeys!" commanded his silencer. "That voice of yours sounds like a saw going through a pine-knot, and we've had enough agony for one day. Besides, you're scaring your new girl."

Tim, about to launch a belligerent reply, gulped and glanced at Nuné. Around the room, weary warriors had started up at the commotion and stood poised, some grasping spears. But Tim saw only the girl, who was staring at him. Whatever he might have intended to say or do was knocked out of his mind by two words from her.

"*Está loco?*" she quietly asked José. "He is crazy?"

"*Sí!*" instantly responded the satirical conqueror. "He has a demon."

THE effect of the jest was most unexpected. Knowlton and McKay, as was natural, chuckled at Tim's black scowl toward José, and the king cackled over his own joke. But Nuné neither smiled nor shrank away in superstitious fear. Her left hand slipped within the robe drawn diagonally across her breast; came out again, and poised before her lips. In her fingers now shone a small gold cross.

While smiles faded and eyes opened, she moved slowly toward Tim, her gaze dwelling steadfastly on him. In tones low but resonant she murmured words which meant nothing to the white men, yet which conveyed the solemnity of an exorcism. Utter silence gripped the house; the white men standing motionless, the fierce warriors seeming to hold their breath, the brown women staring dumbly at this new thing. And Nuné, her clear face and deep eyes alight with lofty purpose, came to a pause within arm's length of the red-headed man and became silent in her turn. For a long minute the tense stillness held. Then she drifted back from him; the gold cross slipped within her robe and was gone; and she said simply, in Spanish—

"You are well."

At that moment, somewhere in the nearby jungle, broke out the discordant roars of a howling-monkey—as if the savage wilderness were voicing derision of human faiths. Tim blinked, rubbed a hand across his eyes and stared again at Nuné. A hum of muttered words rose from the warriors. The white men relaxed and watched the girl glide back to her former place near José.

"Well!" exclaimed Knowlton. "What sort of hocus-pocus do you call that?"

"Grrrumph! 'Tain't no hocus-pocus, ye ignorant Protestant," retorted Tim, still eying the girl. "This here Hozy—the grinnin' baboon—told her I had a divil, and she took it serious and tried to drive it out o' me. She must be a woman priest or somethin'."

"Your pardon, friend Tim, but it was not I who made her think you mad," José sardonically corrected. "It was yourself, with that fearful howl of yours. And, *por Dios*, if it is not a demon that forces you to yell in that way, I do not know what it is. My men here were almost ready to stab you."

"For which I don't blame them," affirmed McKay.

Tim snorted, but said no more. As the four moved to the spot where their delayed meal awaited them, all studied Nuné with new curiosity but without questions. Further talk could wait until sharp appetites were appeased. Behind them, still dutifully following as she had been bidden, the strange girl came, watching the muscular man whose "demon" she had just expelled.

Where they had recently sat, a new fire now burned; and beside it stood the scarred chief, Curac, directing the labors of several women prisoners as efficiently as if the meal of his king were as important as a battle. Game, freshly killed by the now-dead Jivero men, had been collected from various parts of the tribe-house and now was broiling;

fruits had been brought, and great clay jars of water stood ready.

With one accord the whites bathed, and with keen relish they attacked the viands. José, by a wordless gesture, indicated that Nuné was to share in the feast; and, squatting with the lithe ease of a true Indian, she ate eagerly. From time to time her eyes encountered Tim's, but now they regarded him as impersonally as any of his mates.

When the meal was ended, night had come. The packs of the Americans had been brought in and unobtrusively deposited near them. Curac had sent men to relieve the guards at the women's entrance, and posted others at the men's door as night sentries. The serving-women were banished to their quarters, and, in all the room occupied by the fighters, no woman remained save Nuné. Through the smoke of a new cigaret José quizzically regarded her.

"Let me see your cross," he commanded.

She hesitated, searching his eyes. Then she drew out the gold symbol, but did not remove its slender cord from around her neck. José reached, took it—not irreverently—in his palm, weighed and scrutinized it, and gave it back to her.

"Pure gold," he judged, "and made in a rough clay mold by one not skilled at such work."

Then, in Spanish—

"From what place did you obtain this?"

She made no reply.

"Answer!" snapped her inquisitor. "Answer, or I give you as slave to—to these three."

He jerked his head toward the bearded foreigners.

"Aw say, Hozy, give the kid a chance—" began Tim.

But Nuné interrupted him. Rising, she spoke, calmly as ever—

"If Piatzo wills that Nuné be a slave, it is well."

"*Sí?*" jeered José. "And why should Piatzo care for what happens to you?"

"Nuné is the servant of Piatzo. Unless Piatzo so wills, no man nor beast can harm her."

The King of the White Ones sat silent, drawing again at his cigaret. At a word from him, those warriors of his would have speared her without compunction. But he did not speak any such word. He only eyed her shrewdly. Then he answered:

"*Bien.* Soon Piatzo will command you to speak and tell me all. Until that time you shall go safely and be protected from all evil. Now rest through the night on that bed."

He pointed to a bamboo couch just beyond.

"It is well."

She turned, lay down on the designated couch and was still.

"Oh-ho!" yawned José, stretching himself. "*Tengo sueño*—I am sleepy. It has been a long day. Good night, friends."

"Wait a minute," remonstrated Knowlton. "What does all this mean? Who's Piatzo, and so on?"

"Piatzo is the Great Father—*Dios*—God. Tim had it right; this woman is a priestess, though I never before knew of such a one. She does not feel like talking now, and so she believes Piatzo does not will her to talk—and she would not talk even if tortured. So we should be fools to waste more time on her tonight. When she is moved to speak freely—as she probably will be when she becomes better acquainted with us—I think we shall learn much."

He yawned again, and curled up on his couch. The others finished their smokes and did likewise. Silence, broken from time to time only by the quiet freshening of the little mosquito-smudges glowing here and there, settled on the house which last night had sheltered murderous savages, tonight protected their conquerors and the strange priestess of Piatzo, and tomorrow would vanish from the face of the earth.

CHAPTER V

JUNGLE JUSTICE

IN THE misty half-light of a new dawn, men moved slowly along the outer wall of the tribe-house, piling wood. Day had not yet come; in fact, the surrounding jungle still was the abode of dense gloom, and even in the clearing all was vague. But the silent warriors laying those piles moved as easily as if under a brilliant sun, and with a sureness indicating that they had done such work before. These were the men of Aillu—the last relief of the night watch, now finishing their tour of duty by preparing to destroy the house which they had guarded.

At half a score of places they built up those slanting heaps of light, tindery dry stuff, reaching to the palm thatch. Meanwhile, within the house, other warriors lounged and watched the women prisoners revive the cooking-fires and make ready for the morning meal. In the center of the room, their king and his friends likewise sat at ease beneath the pole on which dangled the little leering heads. Four young Jivero women were sluggishly at work at the royal fire.

"Wal, cap," yawned Tim, "it's movin'-day again, as usual. Where do we go from here?"

McKay's eyes lifted to the heads, then swung to José.

"See here, José," he said curtly. "We're here to find Dave. You know something, and you're holding back. Is he dead or alive?"

The other met his gaze defiantly.

"I do not know, *cap*—Rodrigo."

A moment's silence. McKay's gray scrutiny probed the brown eyes. Not a lash flickered.

"If you don't know, what do you suspect?"

The Spaniard shrugged.

"Suspicions are not knowledge. I may suspect many things, and all of them may be far from the truth. In other years I acted often on what I suspected, without waiting to know; and I made mistakes. Now that I have more ways of gathering knowledge, I do not trust so readily in suspicions."

"Which doesn't answer my question."

"True. And, with your pardon, I shall not answer it until any suspicion which I now may have shall become more strong."

For no apparent reason, he glanced at Nuné, who was watching the colloquy.

"Until that time—and it may not be long—I shall be much honored if you will visit my little camp in the eastern hills. I return there today."

The three frowned thoughtfully. McKay, in fact, scowled as if angered by the other's evasions. Then Knowlton said:

"We'd sure like to do that, old-timer, and we will—when we've located Dave. But right now——"

"I understand, *amigo*," smiled José. "Yet are you not foolish? Remember that you know nothing of where Señor Dave is; that there is no good reason to suppose him to be at Macas; that if you three go on alone, you will almost certainly meet with more such men as you met yesterday, and that you cannot forever go blundering about this region and winning fights.

"At my camp we may all learn much more quickly what we wish to know, and then we can act with sense and force. I cannot go farther westward now, because I am not equipped for a long trail; this raid to this place was a personal matter, and now that my purpose is fulfilled I go back. Later—perhaps very soon—we all may come westward again and succeed. I know that when you three have once set your faces forward you go on in spite of death and the devil, but this time you would be fools to refuse to turn back."

"True enough. We would," conceded McKay. "But that wouldn't stop us from going ahead if we had anything to go on. Look here, José. This 'personal matter' of yours had nothing to do with Dave?"

"Not at all. Some of my scouts who came here on a spying trip found the head of an old friend of mine—a Spaniard of Iquitos." His brow darkened as he glanced at the diabolical dolls on the pole. "A real friend—a true friend—the only friend of my own race I have ever known since I fled from Peru. How he came to die in this place I do not know. But my men stole the head and brought it to me, and I came here to settle the score of my friend. It is well paid. Now, as I was saying, you will come and visit me. Let us eat and go."

He gestured to one of the women. She began slopping portions of warmed-up stew—left over from the night meal—into clay bowls. The Northerners, who had watched him sharply while he explained his presence at this place, relaxed.

"Faith," chuckled Tim, "don't the ol' scalawag put on the dog, though! 'Ye'll do this,' says he, and us hard-boiled guys jest do it. Aw wal, Hozy, ye're dead right. We'll likely git ahead quicker by walkin' backward awhile— Huh? What ye say, Noony?"

Nuné had swiftly risen and caught his hand, into which one of the servants had passed a bowl.

"*Cuidado!* Take care!" she warned.

Then, turning swiftly to José—

"It is well to let these eat first."

With the words she gestured toward the Jivero cooks.

"Ah. *Sí?*" The Spaniard's face darkened again. "You speak well. We shall see."

Harshly then he ground out several Indian words at the nearest woman, at the same time shoving toward her a bowl which she had handed him. The words apparently were unintelligible to her, but his hard face and his action made words unnecessary. Fear glinted in her shallow eyes. She took a backward step.

José shot to full height, seized her shoulder, brought the bowl to her lips. With an animal-like moan, she clamped her mouth tight and writhed to break free. Stark terror now was stamped plain on every feature.

"So!" hissed José.

He hurled the dish to the hard-packed earth, where it smashed.

"Aillu!"

Aillu appeared as if at one bound. Half a dozen alert warriors followed him. A wrathful command from José, a gruff grunt from Aillu, and the women were dragged aside.

"What's the row?" demanded Knowlton.

"These snake-women have poisoned our food!" José snapped. "The toads! By all jungle law I should kill the four of them at once. But I am too much of a fool. Yet there are other punishments— Hah! Yes. I shall reward them fittingly within the hour. *Sí!*"

His teeth flashed in a mirthless grin. Then, turning to the girl, he added in a different tone—

"Nuné, how did you know?"

"They brought dark roots hidden in their hands," she quietly informed him. "They dropped them into the pot. You talked and did not see."

"We were blind fools," he acknowledged. "And we owe you a reward. What thing do you most desire?"

"Nuné would return to her own people."

"Ah. But the way is long and you are alone."

"It does not matter."

"You would not live to make the journey, girl."

"With the hand of Piatzo to lead me I should live."

"Hm!" José cogitated, watching her. Then he nodded shortly. "You shall have your wish. You shall return to your own people. But first you shall march with us a few days toward the rising sun."

"It is well."

She sank back on her couch, letting her eyes drift from man to man, then serenely gazing beyond them. José picked up a fagot and shoved the pot from the fire, overturning it. After poking a minute among the spilled chunks of meat and yuca, he grunted and picked up a small brownish thing resembling a wet roll of tobacco.

"She speaks truth," he said. "Here is one poison-root. Comrades, shall we make a new meal here, or ——"

"Not me, by cripes!" vowed Tim. "I lost me appetite. Let's hit the trail and kill somethin' clean to eat. This here dump goes against me stummick."

"Same here," seconded Knowlton.

McKay nodded, adding—

"Your men all right?"

José swiftly scanned the place.

"I think so. But ——"

Raising his voice, he rapped out a command. Men who were eating stopped. Others, about to begin, shoved their food from them. Another curt order, and all began picking up weapons.

"We go," added José. "I myself am no longer hungry. We shall eat on the trail. No, do not burden yourselves with your packs. Our prisoners are as strong as men, and they shall do men's work—to make them forget poisonous thoughts. Carry only your guns."

* * *

A FEW more words to Aillu, and that saturnine chieftain strode to the doorway leading into the women's quarters. In a couple of minutes he was back with six stockily-built women, who brought with them large circular baskets to which were attached broad bark head-straps.

Among these six was divided the equipment of the three North Americans; and when the baskets were loaded the women slung them on their backs with an ease bespeaking long usage to weightier burdens. Other women followed, some laden with similar baskets containing food, others carrying babies, and still others with nothing at all. Herded by the warriors, they filed through the outer entrance. Last in line, and separated from the rest by a special guard of the men of Aillu, passed the four who had dropped the poison-roots into the pot.

"We go," repeated José, picking up his rifle. Then, glancing for the last time at the little heads clustered on the pole—"*Adios*, you who were men!"

And he turned his back on them and swung doorward.

Outside, the sun now was shooting long

rays athwart the clearing. Around the house already stood men holding torches taken from the fires. José glanced about and spoke one word—

"Burn!"

He walked away among the stumps, heading toward the sun. The human herd moved with him, the North Americans alone looking back. They saw the fire-bearers kindle the piles they had placed; saw the flames crawl rapidly to the eaves, smoulder in the damp thatch, and begin to creep upward and aside. Then, stumbling over roots or bumping against stumps, they had to watch their footing.

At the edge of the trees all paused. José keenly surveyed the doomed house and nodded. Under a growing cloud of black smoke the flames now were eating swiftly toward the peak from all sides of the structure, drying out the thick leaf-layers and converting them into tinder. In a few more minutes the place would be a raging furnace.

"*Bueno!* And now to reward our gentle friends who so love the brown roots. You have wondered, *amigos,* what I would do with them? You shall see; and see also how queer is the mind of a woman. Their punishment is to do only what they most wanted to do—to remain here."

At his command, the guilty four were brought to him. Briefly, harshly, he spoke in a jargon unknown to the Northerners. Curac, standing beside him, translated in a growling tone. A minute passed, while the minds of the women grasped his meaning. Then their faces turned gloomy. Gloom became fear. One spoke, thrusting her chin toward the others who bore packs, while her tone became a whine. A curt refusal from José stopped her. A few more incisive words, another translation by Curac, and the four shrank back and walked miserably away.

"You see, *amigos.* They now wish to be slaves: to go with the other women, not to be left alone. Though they tried to poison us, I do not kill them, nor even whip them. Yet they are not satisfied. It is true that they are left without home, without men, without weapons, to await whatever may happen to them; but they have their plantation to give them food, and liberty to do whatever they will—except to follow us. And because they cannot follow us, they are not content."

Knowlton eyed him and glanced at the four condemned to abandonment.

"Well, but here, José, what will become of them?"

"How do I know? That is for the jungle to decide. Perhaps, in time, Jivero men will chance on them and give them new slavery; perhaps some other fate will come to them. I have nothing to do with that. I go, and leave them free and well and strong. I only tell them that they must not follow, and that if they do they will be dealt with according to their own law—the Jivero law for women who disobey their masters."

"And what's that?" demanded McKay.

"A woman who fights, or who refuses to go with a new master, dies the death of a man; and her head is shrunk like that of a man. A woman who tricks her master for another man has a spear run through her and is spiked to the earth. There are other little penalties, too, for disobedience—such as slowly chopping out all the hair by the roots—which are not pleasant. No, they will not follow us. They know their law."

"Seems a bit rough to leave them at the mercy of the jungle, though," Knowlton grumbled. "Why not take them along, now that you've scared them well?"

"Ho! And have it known to all my people that an attempt to poison me and my comrades went unpunished? *Por Dios!* What is that but an invitation to all the world to kill me? You have been too long away from the jungle, friend, and grown soft. Let no more be said. We go."

He looked again at the house, now bursting into complete conflagration; signaled to his captains, and turned away from Jivero stronghold and Jivero assassins. Headed by a handful of scouts, the line began to file into the forest: Aillu and his men in the vanguard, the prisoners following, and the force of Curac falling in after them. José waited.

"Wal, speakin' for Timmy Ryan," the red-headed man vouchsafed, "the —— can fly away with anybody that tries poisonin' me, whether it's man, woman, or child. The only difference between them women and four snakes is in their shape, and I never seen you guys ask a snake whether 'twas a he or a she before ye killed it. Me, I think Hozy's lettin' 'em down easy. Come on, let's go. No packs or nothin' to carry today, and a young army o' hard guys to break trail for us—this is what I call reg'lar travelin', if ye ask me. Snap into it! Hayfoot, strawfoot— Huh! My gosh, fellers, look who's here!"

Nuné, with the naive nonchalance of a true jungle woman, was preparing herself for a long trail. She had slipped out of her short robe, and, with a few swift folds, a roll, and a couple of knots, she transformed it into a compact little bundle with two loops, through which she deftly slid her arms. A moment more, and she stood ready, the little roll lying snugly behind her shoulders in knapsack fashion; her lithe, slender figure clad only in a tight *tanga*, or hip-girdle, with the gold cross nestling between her virginal breasts: a dryad of the jungle, limned clear and clean against the dense greenery beyond.

Head high, she gazed questioningly at the man whom she recognized as leader, awaiting his assignment to a place in line. The King of the White Ones, with only a casual glance, motioned her ahead of him and began to march. The Americans took up the step

"Boy, oh boy!" breathed Tim. "All the priests I ever knowed before now wanted me to go to heaven, but I don't care if I go to —— with this one!"

CHAPTER VI

THE STRONGHOLD

FIVE suns slid across the great green abyss and vanished behind the colossal wall of the Andes. Five nights whelmed the forest in blackness, through which moved only the savage or venomous creatures spawned to prey in gloom. While the sixth sun yet was high, a twisting line of warriors and women emerged from a shadowy defile among mountains and ended its journey.

It had been a steady march. Throughout the first day the column had met no opposition, nor any obstacles except the usual jungle traps—swamp-holes, fallen trunks, thickets of thorny palm, networks of tough woody vines, which were passed by detours or penetrated by machete-work. That night the expedition had made bivouac on the western shore of the Pastasa, killing its cooking-fires as soon as the available game had been broiled, and sleeping without lights. The next morning the Indians had produced, from the apparently empty shore-growth, a number of thin-shelled dugout canoes, in which all were ferried over the fast-flowing river. Then a detachment of paddlers had manned the canoes and vanished up-stream, while the main body resumed its progress through the bush.

"They will take the boats up to a creek, bring them inland, hide them, and then rejoin us," José explained. "I keep canoes hidden in many places for use as needed: here on the Pastasa, eastward on the Curaray, and even on that Tigre Yacu to the south, where we four once journeyed to find gold or death." He grinned reminiscently at his old-time partners. "And you may have noticed that they are made thin, so that they weigh much less than the clumsy dugouts used by most men. That makes it possible to slide them easily overland if needed—though they are more liable to crack than if they were thick. It is thus that we move fast when we will, and keep in touch with the Napo or the Amazon—where I get my guns."

"Keeping open your communications," nodded McKay. "Mighty important. But why go to the Napo?"

"Traders come up the Napo, with cartridges. I buy them."

"I see. And this little camp of yours that we're heading for—it's your main camp?"

"Yes. A poor, rough place, but one where I hope you can be comfortable."

From that time onward, they had plodded along toward the poor, rough place of which he spoke. At the next night-halt, fires were kept burning; and among the faces observed by the North Americans were those of the paddlers sent away with the canoes. When and where these men had rejoined the force they did not know. Somewhere along the way they had slipped out of the tangle and merged unnoticed with the moving chain. Observing the apparent carelessness of that night's camp—the continuance of fires and the lack of night guards—the three adventurers inevitably felt that enemies might slip up as easily as had those returning canoe men, to massacre all as they slept. But they voiced no criticism and lost no sleep. The next forenoon they revised their opinion.

As they marched onward, from a point not far ahead sounded deep, resonant notes—the signal of a heavy log drum. No such drum was carried by the men. Later, and at long intervals during the succeeding days, the same notes were repeated, always just a little ahead. But, look as they might when they passed the places whence those sonorous notes boomed, they saw no drum, no camp, no men—nothing but the forest. Previous jungle experience told them, though, that men were there, masked by the tangle, watching the line pass while they remained invisible; men who formed vigilant outposts along the hard-beaten path now being followed by the column. It was quite evident that foes might not find it a simple matter to catch the White Ones napping.

"You've got things organized, José," Knowlton remarked, catching the Spaniard's quizzical glance after one of his vain attempts to locate the signalers. "Did you ever take any military training?"

"Ho! *Por Dios*, no! I, José Martinez, drill and walk and turn at the bidding of a brass-buttoned monkey? Not I! All that I know about organization is what common sense tells me. Yet there may be soldier sense in my blood, for I, as you know, am of the Conquistadores." He said it proudly. "Outlaw as I am, my fathers were of the conquerors who seized and held this South America. It may be that their ghosts whisper to me what to do. *Quién sabe?*"

"Faith, I believe ye," Tim seriously agreed. "It's in yer blood. Same as it's in us three fellers' blood to go hornin' into places like this here, when there's many a safer thing to do. Same as it's in Noony's blood to—uh—wal, to be different from them Jivero females, if ye git what I mean. Blood tells, as the feller says."

All four of them glanced at Nuné, swinging along with tireless pace, as much of a mystery as she had been on that first day. She still traveled in the place to which José had assigned her—a place of honor, she seemed to feel, since it was with the white men—and still preserved the silence which Piatzo or her own mood laid on her lips. Despite repeated questionings at the night halts, she had told nothing more about herself or her people. What sort of blood had she? As Tim said, it differed from that of the head-hunters who had captured her.

And now, on the sixth day, they were ending their traverse. For the past two days they had been mounting slopes, climbing higher and higher in country which became more and more broken. On this morning, the tail of the serpentine line had become its head; for José and his companions, hitherto marching in the most likely post of danger—since any attack would probably come from behind—now took the lead. Through a deep, narrow, rock-walled rift they twined along, the Americans looking aloft at times to see foreshortened figures peering down at them from the cliff edge. Then suddenly they debouched from cool shadow into blazing sun—from the clutching confinement of the jungle to a broad vista that halted the newcomers in amazement.

"This is my little camp," grinned José, waving a careless hand toward the panorama.

The little camp was perhaps two miles wide. It lay in a rugged mountain bowl, the steep green slopes of which were varied here and there by precipices of naked rock. From side to side stretched rolling hillocks, like motionless billows of an emerald sea. Near the middle rose an isolated rock island, on the top of which glimmered yellow roofs. Here and there along the verdant knolls were glimpsed other roof-peaks, and many small dents in the greenery betokened clearings. Scanning the whole expanse with a rapid survey, the strangers presently looked down at what lay below their feet. They found themselves about two hundred feet above the valley floor, to which a zigzag path dropped in swift slants from the defile through which they had entered. No house-tops showed near at hand, but before long they learned that houses were there too, concealed by the lofty trees.

"Gee cripes!" blurted Tim. "Wha'd'ye mean, little camp? This here is a young city. Mean to say this is all yourn?"

"Most certainly, friend Tim. This, and all beyond the mountains, for many a league. Yet the land beyond the mountains is nothing to me, except as it breeds men for me. This is the heart of my land, for this is where I live; and the heart of the heart is that little rock over yonder, on which I have a house. Come, let us go there and see what we may see."

Knowlton, whose blue eyes had been contemplating the scene as those of an artist would drink in a new vista, turned impulsively.

"Good work, old man!" he exclaimed. "You've created something here. There's an atmosphere about this place—a feeling of—well, not of civilization; civilization's too cold and artificial and treacherous—but of hominess, so to speak. As if your people lived straight and pulled together and fought clean—I can't just tell you what I mean, but I'm sensitive to first impressions, and—well, this seems real!"

He stopped, flushing, as if embarrassed by his enthusiasm. José nodded, his hawk face softening.

"*Teniente*, you could not have said a thing more kind," he responded. "It is what I have striven to do—to make this real. In other places and at other times I have done things which the world calls bad. But here I found a ruin, and I have made a home."

FOR a silent moment he looked out again over his domain; a dominant fighter leaning on a gun, clad in blood-stained garments, backed by killers fresh from a death-raid; yet, for the time, only a gentle-hearted man gazing on the home he had reared for himself and his own. Then he recalled himself.

"*Caramba!* I grow sentimental! Here I stand dreaming like a love-sick boy, while the sun fries my soft brains. I need red meat in my jaws and drink in my belly. *Vamos!*"

With a truculent swagger he began swinging down the path, followed by Nuné. The Americans, resuming their way, noted with some surprize that the girl once more was clothed. While they had gazed and talked, she had made one quick survey of the settlement and then donned her simple robe. The dryad had vanished and the priestess of Piatzo reappeared.

At the base of the steep descent the path straightened out and, with slight bends, led away through the luxuriant woods. Only a few paces from the cliff-slope stood a low, broad house, with solid walls of *chonta* wood, before which lounged a small knot of soldierly savages. José, striding past, emitted a single curt grunt, to which they replied in kind, remaining unmoved. The Americans judged them to be guards, now off duty, of the natural gateway through which they had just come.

For some little distance beyond this point no house was visible; but by-paths vanishing into the greenery indicated the existence of hidden homes or other resorts. Little streams, each bridged by a few split palm-trunks lashed together, cut the path at intervals; the valley evidently was well-watered. Then, from time to time, small clearings with well-made huts were glimpsed through fringes of trees beneath which all undergrowth had been cut away. At length a broader path opened at the right, revealing a log stockade with a half-open gate. Looking backward soon after passing this, Knowlton saw that the line following him had shrunk to a half-score of riflemen. The Jivero women evidently had been herded into the corral, and the fighting men had either stopped there or scattered among the by-paths.

Finally they came out of the woodland and found themselves in a stumpy clearing, whence rose the rock which they had viewed from the entrance. For more than a hundred feet it towered above them, seemingly unscalable. Along its edge José led, and presently they were climbing among big boulders, turning at short angles. A few minutes later they were above the stones and following an ascending ledge on the face of the parent rock. And then they were at the top, passing a small garrison-hut where silent men armed with ten-foot lances squatted at ease, but wide-awake and ready. Beyond was a cluster of solid, cool-looking houses, shaded by short trees which stood sturdily in the shallow soil topping the stone.

"And so we come home," said José. "A poor, rough place, as I have said. Yet I promise that you shall find it more comfortable than some of the mosquito-cursed mud-holes in which you and I have made camps in the years gone by. First let us bathe, without fear of snake or crocodile, and then we shall eat such crude fare as we may find, and afterward look about. Come."

Up to the first and largest house he strode, the others scanning the surroundings as they walked. To the men, the most noticeable thing was that a wall of rock-blocks, waist-high, rimmed the edge of the precipice; a defense which seemed not only unnecessary but rather foolish, in view of the height of the place and the great labor involved in bringing the blocks from below. To Nuné, still wordless, the most important circumstance was that three handsome Indian women had emerged from the door and were observing her with expressions none too friendly. Each was garbed in a short, striking frock of bark-cloth beautifully decked with feather-work; each wore a-slant in her black hair a single lustrous plume; and each resembled her companions in face and figure. Quite obviously they were sisters.

"Hullo, girls!" saluted Tim, with a wide grin. "I forgit yer names, but I recollect yer faces and I know ye're all Missus Hozy. We come back to learn yer husband some more bad tricks, if he don't know 'em all now."

The women, though unable to understand his words, smiled recognition. José chuckled. Then, in a few curt phrases, he gave them commands regarding Nuné. Without reply, they looked steadily at the new woman brought home by their hawk-faced lord; turned, with a slight beckoning motion of the head, and led the way toward one of the other houses. Nuné, cool and confident as ever, followed.

"Jealous," muttered Tim, adding, a bit anxiously: "And I seen them girls do some wicked scrappin' oncet on a time. They won't do her no harm, will they, Hozy?"

"All women are jealous," José answered, with a slight smile. "But I am master here. They will not harm her."

Straight through the house he went, and out into a *patio* where, in a square basin of stone, lay a deep, dark pool. Stone blocks beside it formed seats.

"Our bathing-place, fed by springs and made for us long before we were born," their host announced.

And, with no more ado, he peeled off his shirt. With one accord his hot, travel-stained companions stripped.

"Ooch!" gasped Tim, rising from his first plunge. "Ice-water! Colder'n —— I mean, lovely and warm, looey. What ye waitin' for? C-c-come on in, it's g-g-great!"

He clenched his jaws to still his chattering teeth.

"Oh, the bulldog on the bank
And the bullfrog in the pool,"

sang Knowlton, standing nude and laughing down at him.

"The bulldog called the bullfrog
A green old water fool!
Singing tra-la-la——"

"Hey! Let go! Ouch!"

Splash!

The bullfrog had grabbed the bulldog's ankles with two huge fists and yanked him in.

CHAPTER VII

THE OUTLAW KING

IN THE cool shadow of a spacious piazza, swept by a lusty breeze from the east, the four men lounged luxuriously in hammocks, smoking and gazing out across the valley at the farther heights.

They had dined—not crudely, as José had intimated, but on a profusion of meats and fruits served at a massive mahogany table by half-nude girls of the White Ones. They had drunk of a colorless but mellow liquor which, José said, was palm wine; and now they smoked home-made cigars rolled from tobacco grown on some plantation near by. All were freshly clothed, the spare kits of the Americans having been brought up while they ate, and Jose having donned a clean set of his *llanchama* fiber garments. And now they were wondrously comfortable and content.

McKay, lolling with long legs dangling from his hammock, flicked an ash from his cigar and spoke.

"You said you'd found a ruin here and made a home. What was the ruin?"

"The ruin of a place destroyed, Rodrigo. A place of stone, which once must have been—as Tim said some time ago—a young city; and, perhaps, not so young. Who made it—what destroyed its people—I do not know. It was made long ago, and ended long ago; so long that there is no knowledge of it among my White Ones. And, for that matter, my White Ones do not even know who they themselves are.

"*Sí*, it is so. Their only name for themselves—except 'White Ones'—is Sumataras. There is no such race as the Sumataras, so far as I have ever heard. Yet I know that the river which now is called Pastasa, and which has been so called for many years, has a more ancient name: the name of Sumatara. My people call it always Sumatara, and say it is their river, but they do not know why they call it so. They have been for centuries a lost, scattered, unknown people, and they have forgotten their own beginnings. It is a marvel that they still exist.

"My own idea—which is worth little, since there is no proof—is that they are the last of some white race which at some time lived in the west, and which perhaps was driven eastward through the mountains and down the Pastasa; and that perhaps later on the head-hunting brutes called Jiveros broke them, or a great pestilence destroyed all but a few; and that they had to withdraw into this region to exist. It may be so, or it may not. Who can solve the mystery of this unknown land which swallows up men and races? But I know that they are far different from all other peoples in this Oriente. It is not only that they are far more fair of skin, but their eyes are set differently in their heads; their minds are different—yes, their skulls are different: more long and narrow. It is true that their ways are Indian, but in this land of the Indian there are no other ways.

"But you were asking about this place, and not about my people. It is a long tale, but I shall try to make it short. And since talking is dry work— Saquina!"

From the doorway came one of the serving-girls, bearing more of the palm wine. As she passed it about, the whites looked more critically than hitherto at her well-shaped head, straight-set eyes and trim figure. A typical girl of the White Ones, she was indeed far different from the Jivero women. Yet she also differed from Nuné, her face being broader and somewhat heavier of chin. The half-formed thought that Nuné might be a stray member of this race flickered out.

"Now," resumed José, licking his mustache, "let us begin at the beginning and tell the story as it should be told. How does a good tale start in your tongue?"

" 'Once upon a time—' " quoted Knowlton.

"Ah. Good! So it shall be.

"Once upon a time, *señores*, there was a Peruvian, one José Martinez, who must flee for his life because he had killed in fight a human snake who held a position of power in the Peruvian Government. He escaped through the mountains and vanished into the jungle at the east. And there he led a life such as a villain of his class must lead, trusting no man and existing by his quickness with the knife and the bullet.

"Then, after a time, came North Americans, who not only did not seek to take the life of José but saved it for him when he was at the point of death. Yes, they did even more than this for him, though they did not know it. By their stubborn determination to succeed in what they came for, they did succeed; and so they proved to José that if a man will set his mind on doing a thing and never quit striving until that thing is done, he can accomplish what other men call impossible. And when they went away, the ambition of José, which had long been nearly dead, began to revive. Even though he was an outcast with a price on his head, he still was a man, not a brainless beast to be used for the good of other men; and he could make his future better than his past, if he was enough of a man to do it.

"More time went on, and then he heard of gold on the Tigre Yacu, where men disappeared or came back maimed and mad. He went to that river, determined to win gold or death for himself. And there, by chance, he met again his North American comrades, and on that evil river they found great wealth. Then they went away again—all but José, whose ambition now had grown all the more great. He was not satisfied to be merely a rich man. He now would be a king."

He paused, smiling out at the distance. The others hung motionless, eyes riveted on his face.

"José had met the White Ones of the Tigre Yacu," he resumed, "and had made himself one of them. *Sí*, he had joined them most thoroughly, for he had taken all nine daughters of old Chief Pachac as his wives; and when Pachac was killed in battle, José was chief of all his tribe who were left. But those few White Ones were not enough for him to rule—the Tigre Yacu country was not large enough to be his kingdom. He knew that there were other White Ones, hidden away here and there in the thick country about the Cordillera del Pastasa.

"He knew that all this wild country between the Andes, the Amazon, and the Cordillera del Putumayo was claimed by both Peru and Ecuador, but was really no man's land, since no government could conquer its savages and thus control it. So now he, who had no country and no rights and so was no man, would make all this no-man's-land his own. King No-Man, of No Man's Land! Hah!

"So José and his own little band of White Ones traveled the trails and the streams, seeking out those other scattered White Ones and talking to them of the remaking of their nation. And, *señores*, it was no easy matter to make them see what seemed so plain. There was no organization among them; each little tribe lived where it would and moved as it pleased, and it had been thus for so many lifetimes that at first they would not think of gathering together and being ruled in a body. They said that in that way they would become mission Indians, and so become weak and easy victims for the head-hunters. In that they showed good sense: for although the priests think they are doing much good in making the Indians 'civilized' and stopping them from fighting, they really are only making them soft and fattening them for the butchers. Any man who knows this country can tell you how the mission Indians to the west and south have been butchered by the Huambizas.

"But when José made it plain that he came not to preach peace but to breed war on the Jiveros, then the other chiefs of the White Ones began to see differently. Among all the White Ones there is a blood-hate for the head-hunters, more bitter than any hate I ever have seen; it is born in them, a hundred times more fierce than the hate for a snake. And so when they found that there would be war to the death against those murderers, and that their own nation would again grow strong by coming together, then the task of José became more easy."

Again he paused. When he went on he discarded the impersonal form of narration and spoke directly of himself.

"NOW, in wandering among these people, I had always been looking for a spot which would be good for a strong settlement; but I found none which suited me. But at length I came here, to visit certain White Ones who were living over yonder, on a stream which you have not yet seen. Before I left them to visit others, I decided that this should be the spot where all should gather and make their home. As you see, it is wide, well-watered and fertile, with a natural wall all about it. There are only five passes through that wall, and all are narrow and easily guarded. And if by any chance enemies should succeed in coming through, here is this wide rock, where even a small force could hold off many times their number."

"But those mountains don't look insurmountable," interrupted McKay. "What's to hinder Jiveros from disregarding your five entrances and crawling up and over through the thick woods?"

"Several things," smiled José. "They are not so easy as they look. There are many places which can not be climbed. There are other places where wide splits in the rock bar any man from crossing. And in spots where neither of these barriers exist, there are such thick growths of thorn-trees that no bare Indian could slip through. Those thorns stand just where they are needed, and I can not believe that they grow at those spots by chance. I think they were planted there by whatever people held this place long ago. They had a neat settlement here, those first ones. I wish I could know who they were.

"In this valley, for as long as the White Ones can remember, have grown many kinds of fruits and other foods—growing wild, without care except the little attention given to some of them by the women; all planted, without doubt, by those forgotten ones. On this rock, where now we rest, they had large houses of stone; and down below, in many places, were other such houses. That, I think, was their great mistake, for when I came here not one stone house remained—there was nothing but heaps of rocks, and those below here still are nothing else, for we have not moved any except those found up here. Some terrible earthquake must have smashed them all at once. Perhaps that was the end of all the people here. A sudden *temblor* in the night, when all slept, and——"

He motioned as if crushing an insect.

"So I have not repeated that mistake. All our houses are broad and low and made of wood; the walls are of *chonta*, which will stop even a bullet, and yet are not so heavy as to crush us if they fall in. The stones which once were houses up here now rest yonder at the edge, where we placed them as a wall when we cleared this spot. It was as easy to pile them as to throw them over, and at some time they might be useful to drop on the head of visitors. My men who guard the tops of the passes all are well supplied with stones also, as a discouragement to strangers from the west."

"Oof! And we passed right under some o' them head-crackers when we come in," recalled Tim.

"Just so. But the signals sent ahead

told that all was well. I have a telegraph system too, you see."

"How do you work it? I heard it, but I couldn't see it," said Knowlton.

"It is the *tunday*—the log drum which the Jiveros themselves use. I will show it to you presently, for I have one here. This is the—ah——"

"Central station. Headquarters," supplied McKay.

"Exactly. We have our own code, so that no sneaking Jiveros could understand it. But now let me speak of more important matters of organization, so that you may see how I progress.

"As you know, I had much gold when you left me. I now know where there is even more, for my people have told me of certain places along this cordillera where one has only to dig it out. But I have not yet touched it, and perhaps I never shall. It is useful to me only to arm my men. Oh yes, I could buy many other things through the traders who supply my arms, but it has become my habit to make the jungle give me what I need, and to do without the things of 'civilization'—bah! an empty name, that 'civilization,' which loads a man with useless burdens. Guns and ammunition and machetes, however, I must have. So, as I have told you, I obtain them from traders on the Amazon or the Napo, sending out certain men of mine to meet them and bring back the goods. No trader is allowed to come here, or even to know where this place is.

"So I keep my men well-armed; and I have trained them all in the handling of a carbine, though not all of them carry guns when on a march. Every man of mine is a warrior, and can use rifle, machete, arrow, or spear with ease. Every boy is learning the use of weapons. In a few more years the White Ones will be a fast-growing nation to be feared by better men than the Jiveros. And——"

"Wait a minute," McKay broke in again. "You said 'fast growing.' How so?"

"Hah! How do you suppose a nation grows?" laughed the Spaniard. "By being born. Is it not so? *Bien.* I have seen to it that more children shall be born to the White Ones than before."

"Oh. Jivero mothers?"

"*Sangre de Cristo!* No! Those black-toothed animals become the mothers of my future warriors? They are slaves! Slaves who do the work for the women of the White Ones, and so give the mothers more time to care for themselves and their children. Slaves they are, and slaves they stay.

"See. We must have slaves. My men are warriors and hunters, and they do only the work such men should do. Their women are mothers to as many children as they can bear. So the Jivero women are the workers on the plantations. And, having no mates, they will have no more children. That is one more way by which we shall overcome the Jivero nation.

"We kill the Jivero men; we take away the Jivero women and children—giving the women an easier life than they had before, and preventing their bringing more head-hunters into the world. And the Jiveros themselves are helping us by killing one another in their head-hunts; for they are split into tribes such as the Huambizas, the Aguarunas, the Antipas, who war on one another. With the White Ones helping them to grow weaker, while the White Ones themselves grow more powerful—what is the end?"

"The end's the finish o' the Jiveros," chortled Tim. "Boy, ye've got a whale of an ambition, I'll tell the world! But say, all this is goin' to take a long time. S'posin' somethin' happens to ye, or s'posin' ye git old before the finish comes—then who's King Nobody the Second? Have ye got a prince trainin' for the job?"

"Most certainly," grinned the Spaniard. "I now have twelve princes and eight princesses, and there will soon be more."

"Wha-a-at! Twelve and eight—twenty kids in three years?"

"Just so. When I command my people to increase I must set a good example, is it not true? I had hoped to have nine sons each year, but not even a king can regulate such matters. But if I live fifteen years longer——"

"If ye do, ye'll have to make yer Injuns move outside. Ye'll need this whole place for yer own family. Say, when I git back home I'm goin' to ship ye down a statue to stick up on this here rock—a fierce-lookin' guy, with words under it sayin': 'Hozy Marteeny, Father of His Country. Final Score, Boys— blank: Girls—blank.' Then yer oldest boy can fill in the figgers when yer game's called. I bet it'll be a world's record!

"But say, now, on the level, don't this

king business o' yourn make ye feel sort o' tied down? I can see ye take it pretty serious, and it seems like an awful lot o' responsibility. Me, I'd git sick of it after a while and want to be foot-loose, with nothin' on me mind but me hat."

The Spaniard's mirthful face suddenly clouded. For a moment he did not answer. Then he abruptly arose and began pacing up and down.

"Friend Tim, you have touched me on a sore spot," he grudgingly admitted. "It is just as you say. I grow sick of it at times. I become as restless as a *tigre.* While the fit lasts I want to turn my back on all this and be once more a lone rover—to drift without a care, meeting things as they come. That is why I go often with my men on raids, when I should remain here. They could work as well under their own commanders. But I must travel the trails, fight my enemies with my own hands, or I find life flat—yes, unbearable! For only a little time after such a journey, I am content. Then I must move again. Why, in the name of the ——, must a man be so restless?

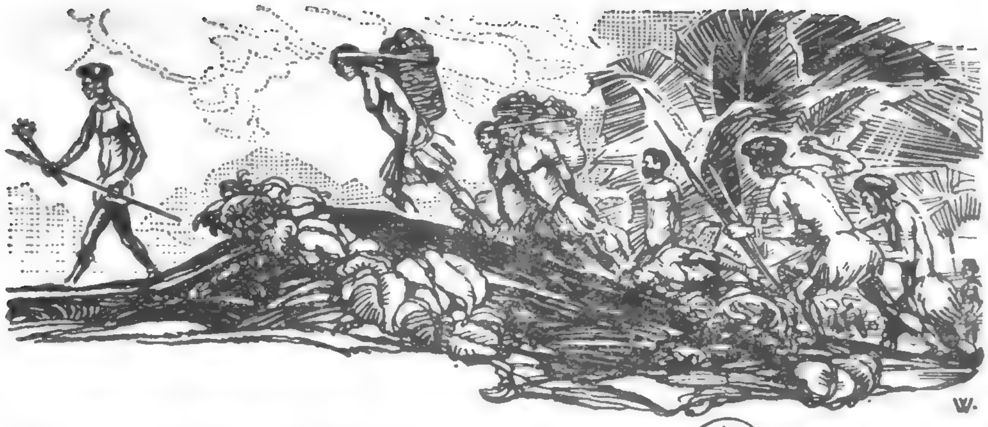
"And that is not all. *Señores,* I am ashamed to confess this thing, and yet it is true. More and more strongly my own blood calls to me—the blood of Spanish people in the west, beyond the great mountains. They have cast me out. They have hounded me, sought my blood. Many a time I have cursed them. Yet—I ache for the friends I once had; for the *fiestas,* the cathedral bells, the voices and the laughter of my own people. I am a white man. I am not an Indian. Yet among Indians I must live, and in the jungle I must die!

"King?" He laughed harshly. "*Sí,* I am a king! I have made myself a king, and built for myself a prison!"

Savagely he paced the earth floor, his face hard-drawn. Nobody spoke. The three stared at their cigar-stubs, avoiding one another's eyes. The abrupt revelation of an unsuspected heart-hunger in this indomitable adventurer stirred them to pity which they could not voice.

With all his pride in his achievements, this King of No Man's Land was but one of that pathetic lost legion whose members are found in all the wild corners of the earth—the "Men Who Can Never Come Back."

TO BE CONTINUED



A STONE AGE VENDETTA

By L. P. B. Armit

FROM the tent door I watched the night fog cover the lowlands with a placid white sea, over which the slender spires and massive peaks of the rugged Owen Stanley—the Roof of Papua—towered stark and clear as if etched against the blue velvet sky.

The rising moon painted the crags and precipices of the range with a brush of molten silver; in the deep gorges and ravines that split the mountains a pearl-gray mist swirled and drifted in the air currents, weaving a gossamer veil over the ink-black shadow of the jungle.

The music of running water filled the air; high overhead the plaintive whistle of wild duck flying to the river flats caused the cheerful chatter of the natives resting around the camp-fires to cease, while the superstitious savages whispered to each other that the wraiths of murdered women were about.

Beyond the red glow of the fires the gaunt, fire-blackened posts of houses stood among the tangle of fern and grass that filled the clearing.

A harsh voice sounded at my elbow —

"Truly, *tamagu* (my father), this is a place of ghosts!"

Pandava, head-man of the carriers and a former hero of many cannibal and head-hunting raids, was speaking.

"*Tamagu*, the boys are afraid of the spirits and want you to fire a shot to frighten the ghosts of the dead women away!" he exclaimed, his eyes full of the fear of the unknown—the terror that makes primitive man cower closer to the fire while his bones seem to turn into water.

I plucked the revolver from my belt and sent a bullet into the silent forest, for long residence among these jungle folk had made me tolerant of their strange beliefs.

The old man sat down before me, his beloved *baubau*—bamboo pipe—and netted bag of "somethings" on his lap. With a prehensile toe he pulled a fire-stick from the fire, and fished a bit of tobacco from his mop of hair with a battle-scarred thumbless hand.

"Why are you afraid, father of many strong sons?" I asked.

"It is our fashion, *tamagu*, to fear the dead; our ancestors had this fear," he answered simply, while his withered fingers shredded the tobacco into a screwed-up leaf, which he placed in a hole in the side of the bamboo.

Putting the open end of the tube to his mouth, he inhaled, filling the pipe with the smoke, removed the cigaret and refreshed himself with the rank smoke, which brought the tears to his eyes.

"Ah, *tamagu*, this tobacco of the highlands is meant for strong men," he remarked, appreciatively. "Many nights like this have I sat in this place and smoked this good tobacco," he added, waving a hand to the narrow clearing.

"But you are not a man from this valley of Boborogolo," I answered.

The old chap glanced towards the naked men before the fires; then, apparently satisfied that they were beyond earshot, he replied:

"Who else could tell you the story of this place of Boborogolo than I, Pandava, the son of Moliasi, for it was in the long ago, before the white foreigners had come into these mountains, that I brought the young men here—and left those posts scorched with the battle-fires!"

"Tell me the tale, old friend; my ears are open to your voice," I said.

SINCE the beginning of all things, when our forefathers came out of the ground to live and die among these mountains, the people of every tribe waged war upon their neighbors. Why this was so nobody ever knew; it had always been the custom to seek revenge for the lives of those who had fallen in the years that had passed. Nearly every family had a vendetta to keep going, and very many of these tribal feuds had commenced so far back that their origin had been lost in the memories of the peoples.

The living folk continued the quarrel, fathers taught their sons the use of weapons so that in their lives they would be able to take payment of lives and heads from their hereditary enemies, for only by the killing of their enemies could proper respect be shown to the memory of those who had gone to the Land of Shadows in the olden days.

Continual vigilance and constant preparedness for war kept the young men in strength and health. Stockades were built around the villages, and houses of refuge were constructed in the tall trees inside the palisades. The manufacture of stone clubs and adzes, and the shaping of spears and shields, in the intervals of felling the jungle and planting food-gardens on the slopes around the villages, all these tasks hardened the muscles of the fighting men and kept them fit and active to take their part in attack or defense.

My father's village had a blood-feud with the men of Boborogolo, for the Dinagolo had many lives to take payment for from the former tribe.

In the days when my grandfather was a lad, the Dinagolo were a strong people, and had much respect shown them by the surrounding tribes—for the Dinagolo spearmen were like the blades of a grass-flat in number. In those days the eaves of the houses in Dinagolo were covered with the skulls of their enemies; truly, my grand father had eaten very many of his worthless enemies!

But when my father became the chief his magic was not strong, for a great sickness swept like a flame through his tribe, killing very many of the people. Wild with terror the families fled from the unseen death into the jungle, but the evil spirit followed them up and slew very many.

Thus it was that when the sickness passed Dinagolo was only a remnant of what it had been, so that when I was a babe they had suffered much tribulation from their enemies at Boborogolo, whom the evil spirit had passed by.

The Boborogolo came down upon the few people that were left to Dinagolo and did what they willed with them, until after much blood had flowed the survivors made a peace with their conquerors. And such a peace! For Boborogolo in their triumph were very cruel, for they scoffed at us in our weakness and treated us as pigs, ordering us, whenever they wished, to send them tribute of flesh.

Great sorrow was in our stomachs always—but we dare not fail to keep the covenant that our masters had laid upon us. The tears of the mothers for their children, or the reckless talk of our few young men, fell on deaf ears when the chief and the elders sought a victim for the stone ovens of the Boborogolo.

The young men with the rashness of youth hungered for the lives of their enemies.

"Let us fight these misbegotten offspring of diseased dogs who would shame us before all men's eyes!" they begged their fathers, who answered:

"Be quiet, you loud-mouthed ones! It is better for a few to die than for all Dinagolo to be wiped out."

The old men were very wise.

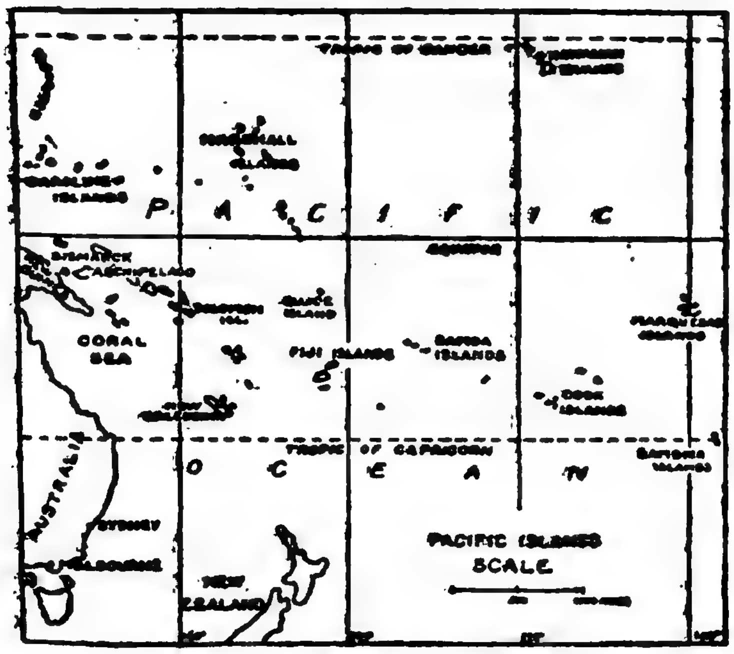
FORTUNE was unkind to me, for when I was barely half-grown, though I was tall and big beyond my years and had much flesh, the hard eyes of Wodavi, a fighting chief of our masters, saw me, and his stomach was glad.

"And this boy, also," he said, indicating me to his young men.

While my mother and sisters screamed and tore their faces and breasts with their finger-nails until the blood flowed, and the Boborogolo laughed mightily, I was seized and dragged away. My body was filled with a great fear—for I knew the manner in which my captors treated their prisoners.

Hustled along by the prick of the spear-points, I was marched off to become baked meat at the harvest festival of our enemies. In my anger I spoke rude words to the spear-men, who taunted me much with the manner in which I would be prepared for the feast; some of them almost quarreled with each other over the bits of me that they desired for themselves.

Three days we travelled through the ranges, here and there stopping to gather food from the streams and forest. The haughty Boborogolo did not burden their backs with the heavy baskets of taro and bananas they had stolen from our gardens at Dinagolo; we, their captives—their prospective baked meat—carried this food, and saw it all disappear into the mouths of our enemies. Not one morsel of this food did they give to us, so that always our bellies cried for something to quiet the gnawing pains that made us stagger and even fall with weakness on the steep hillsides.



Then, when these unspeakable descendants of unmentionable parentage saw that our legs would carry us only a little while longer, they halted to let us hunt the jungle for roots and fruits and search among the boulders in the watercourses for eels and crayfish. But they took the best of what we found, and only let us eat what they did not care for; and then only because they feared that hunger would melt away the fat and meat from our bones.

Truly, my father, that journey through the tall mountains and thick jungle was a sorrowful and painful one for us. Although our feet were moving towards the red fires of the stone ovens and our lives were nearly over, yet ever our stomachs craved for food; near dead and almost done with the things of this life, the thought of food dominated our thoughts above everything else.

Always I was guarded by two men; the other captives marched with their hands tied behind their backs, the baskets slung from their foreheads, as is the custom of women carrying loads. Being only a boy, I was allowed to walk with my hands free, but never once did I get a chance to escape, for the guard was always close within range with their spears. At night we were tied to trees with vines, so that our limbs became stiff and sore each morning, and we were beaten with sticks until we could no longer feel.

When we had come close to Boborogolo, Wodavi halted the party so that he could make magic and send a messenger ahead to warn his people that we were close at hand.

While we waited the warriors painted their faces with red ochre, put on their fighting head-dresses of bird of paradise plumes, draped necklaces of crimson parrot feathers across their chests, put their bamboo beheading knives in their mouths, and decorated their spears with strings of white, green, and yellow feathers.

When they were ready Wodavi led them down the ridge to the village, each man club in hand, brandishing his spears, and swaying in his stride, until, as I glanced back, the whole file seemed tipped with a bobbing line of red-gold plumes, while the drums rolled and the jungle echoed with the war-songs. Very proud and defiant they looked, miserable eaters of filth that they were.

The captives were tied to the posts of the houses, while the wives and sisters of the warriors hastened about with wooden dishes filled with food and long bamboos full of water, which they placed before the returned heroes; but nobody asked the prisoners if they were hungry.

No, there were no soft stomachs[*] among these enemies of ours; why waste good food on those who would soon be sleeping beneath the red-hot stones of the *buri*.[†]

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[*] Kind hearts. [†] Oven.

A great fire was lighted in the street between the houses, for the night had come, and the people needed light to see their victims.

An old man rushed at my uncle, who was tied near me, and screamed:

"Here's a fat pig from Dinagolo. Let me blood my spear!"

He lifted his weapon, but Wodavi stepped forward and knocked him down with a tap of his club-handle.

"Not yet," he said; "let us wait until the moon is high so that there will be proper light for the killing."

While the returned warriors ate and rested around the fire, the people hurried along the preparations for the festival. On each side of the street they had erected a high scaffolding of poles and many-branched saplings, which was decorated with very many bunches of green bananas and long golden plantains. Numerous net-bags of purple *kumara* * and many-fingered brown yams hung from the branches. On the ground below were piled mounds of yams and taro and masses of jungle-cabbage.

In the open space at the end of the village street, the tall carved pillars of the *dubu* † were swathed from foot to summit with clumps of purple and golden-green sugar-cane, and giant-leaved taro. From the summit of the pillars broad pennants and streamers of brown and white pandanus leaves floated in the night breeze; ropes of bright-colored jungle-flowers and strings of foliage and cassowary plumes stretched from the house-tops to the crests of the carved posts.

Hanging from the railings in front of the houses, a line of bleached skulls clinked and rattled in the wind. Boborogolo had much wealth in heads.

Beside the *dubu* the women were busy about the fires, heating the stones for the ovens which gaped in the ground like fresh-dug graves.

The vines that bound me to the house-pile bit into my flesh. I was very hungry. My stomach was cold with the approach of death, but still it cried for food.

"I will ask that grandmother for one of those baked yams," I said to my uncle, Karaudi, who was tied to the next post.

"You will not be hungry very long," he answered. "When the moon is high and the shadows of the posts depart our spirits will be with our ancestors," he added, grimly.

The old woman came over and felt my plump body.

"Much grease does your young skin hold!" she exclaimed, her faded eyes gleaming red with the blood-lust.

"I hunger, mother," I said. "Give me one of those yams you have cooked so well."

"You have a warrior's stomach," she answered, and gave me the yam, standing before me while I ate.

Again she felt my smooth skin and looked intently into my eyes, muttering words I did not understand.

Suddenly she laughed shrilly and struck her breasts with her wrinkled old hands.

"Young man, you are strangely like my son who died many ripenings of the banana before you could have been fathered," she said, her eyes shining with madness. "Ah-e! Ah-e! Ah-e!" she exclaimed. "Pandava! Most beautiful child, truly you were a worthy son of your father, Bobora, mighty killer of men!"

She rocked to and fro and beat her shriveled breasts.

I was chill with the fear of death, but this old woman made me even more terrified.

"Mother," I said, "I also am named Pandava."

She seized me fiercely by the arm so that I nearly cried out with the pain of her grip.

"You are called Pandava?" she asked, her mad eyes peering into mine.

"So my people named me," I made answer.

She turned to the nearest house and brought me a bamboo full of cold water, which she held to my lips while I drank.

"Mother, you have a soft stomach for an enemy," I said, for the sweet water was glad to my parched body.

She turned to spit upon Karaudi, who had craved a drink, and walked away to join the women around the fires.

SOON the drums sounded, a host of painted and plumed warriors dancing before the *dubu*, every man roaring at his loudest the battle-song of the tribe. Like a ribbon of pulsating red-gold the swaying plumes of the head-dresses filled the space between the houses; the air throbbed with the tumult of drums and chanting voices; a pall of dust mingled with the smoke of the fires, whose red flames shed a bloody glare over the scene. To my eyes the place seemed bathed in blood.

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* Sweet potatoes. † Ceremonial platform.

While the dance proceeded we unfortunate captives waited for the end. Though several hours passed, the time seemed very short. The moon climbed fast toward the zenith, where it would mark the hour for our lives to flow from us, as is the custom in these mountains.

Again and again the chant ceased and the dancers rested. With each halt we told ourselves that the hour had arrived—but the voices screamed yet another song of victory, and our shivering bodies thrilled with renewed life. At such times the privilege of being alive is very pleasing. A lad has more desire to live than an old man.

But the dancers were tiring. Here and there men sat with dripping bodies and faces from which the paint was being washed by their sweating pores; the reek of unwashed man mingled with the sweet scent of flowers and the acrid odor of dust and smoke. The drums beat faster while the chant grew fiercer, for the eaters of men were reaching the pitch of madness, their mouths white with froth and their stomachs flaming with the lust to slay in horrid manner the enemies that fate had given into their clutches.

For, my father, as you know, the eating of man is a rite with the dwellers among these tall lands, a rite that is surrounded with much form and ceremony, for by eating the flesh of his enemy the eater absorbs the essence of life—the strength, wisdom, valor and the magic—that is within his victim.

Very pleasant is the flesh of man, but more satisfying to the eater is the knowledge that by this means he is enriching his body with the vigor and spirit substances of his enemy; this is the real motive that makes us eat the meat of man.

The drums crashed out a final triumphant chord, the chant ceased, and the breathless dancers dropped in their tracks to rest a while before the final act.

Mugoni, the chief, stepped upon the *dubu*, a star-shaped stone-club in his hands; beneath him upon the ground Wodavi and his brother-sorcerers with their weapons were at hand to commence their evil work.

"Bring forward those pigs from Dinagolo," ordered the chief.

The young men hastened to obey.

Quickly they cut our bonds and pushed us into the centre of the throng, which moved and turned with savage joy before the place of death.

One of the prisoners, a poor old grandfather from a far-distant tribe, tried desperately to tear himself loose from the men who held him. His eyes seemed to start from his head, while strange meaningless cries came from his mouth, which caused the people much amusement.

"He speaks with the tongue of the spirits," jeered one of his captors, savagely kicking the old man, while the people yelled with laughter.

Suddenly the old man ceased to struggle and went limp in the grasp of his guard—dead. Fear had killed him as swiftly and as silently as the dart of a snake; old men die very easily, for their stomachs are not hard like a youth's.

"Much meat is here, my children," cried Mugoni. "Let the eyes of the women look upon these two-legged pigs, so they may caress them—" he mocked.

Then, while the men held the victims so that they could not escape, the women made sport of them with nails, teeth, and fire-sticks, for the anger of women is very terrible.

A screaming old hag rushed at Karaudi with a flaming brand.

"Smell the scent of the flame," she yelled, and thrust the burning wood into his face.

Women were shrieking like fiends all about the place as they tortured their miserable captives, while the hoarse laughter of their husbands and brothers, who stamped about in savage glee, and the terrible screams of the victims, made a horrid sound.

My inside seemed to shrivel within me, while my body shook and trembled like a man in the grip of the lowland fever. My bones seemed like veins of water. The trees and sky looked very good. The air was very sweet. I looked wildly around to meet the tearing, searing rage of the women, who were beating the shrinking bodies of their victims until the air was filled with the tang of burnt flesh.

I tried to speak as I was held fast by the men, but words would not come to my tongue. I wanted to ask for the swift death that a spear or club can give.

Out of the press of screeching mad

women burst the old hag who had given me food and drink, a short stabbing-spear in her hand.

I shut my eyes. Many breaths passed my lips. I waited for the stroke with flinching body.

Something fell across my shoulders and I was dashed to the ground.

"This is the end," I thought.

But the blow did not come.

I opened my eyes.

The old woman was standing beside me, the spear ready in her hand, as she screamed.

"He is mine! Mine! Have I not covered him with my *rami?* * Keep back or I will kill!"

She lifted her arm for the throw—and the fierce-eyed, blood-hungry females drew back.

A roar of anger came from the throng.

"Kill! Kill! Kill!" they yelled, and pressed slowly closer.

Two young warriors leaped forward and stood beside the old woman, who was calling out:

"It is the custom! He is my child now that I have laid my *rami* on him!"

And the young men answered:

"Truly, it is her rightful claim. We, her daughter's children, say so!"

But the danger was not passed, for when a people are hungering for blood it is difficult to control them.

Angry words rose above the shrill voices of the women, and I could feel death very close to me.

Suddenly a club rose and fell amongst the close-pressed crowd, and a painted spear-man dropped insensible.

Mugoni kicked the prostrate form of the man he had felled, and forced his way into the center of the circle where I lay.

He lifted his club, and the angry voices stilled.

"My children," he said, "it is the custom that our fathers followed, and this youth can not be killed now that the covering of Everi, the widow of Boboro, is upon him. Who are we that we should disobey the law of our ancestors? Do we desire the wrath of the dead to fall upon us?"

His words had effect. The people drew away, although there were several who spoke hard words in their anger at the loss of a victim. But there were other bodies waiting their vengeance—and they quickly wreaked a terrible revenge on these.

Everi sat beside me and wrapped her thin arms around my aching body, while she rubbed her face against mine, as is the fashion of a mother caressing her child. Tears streaked her wrinkled face as she pressed me to her withered breast.

"Pandava!" she cried. "Spirit of my dead babe come back from the land of shadows to gladden my old age!"

And the young men, her grandchildren, wept also, for the wisdom of their mother's mother was theirs also.

My adopted brothers brought food and drink, which the old woman gave to me, after which we chewed betel, taking the lime from the same gourd as is the custom of relatives and friends.

Several of the people scowled at me, but my stomach was without fear, for henceforth I was of their tribe and could not be harmed. Such is the custom of the hill people.

IN THE days that followed I lived very happily, for my adopted family were very good to me, so that I had nothing to fear. But always my stomach was on fire with anger for the cruel treatment that my birthplace received from the Boborogolo, and I longed for the days when I would be a warrior and could take payment for the lives of my people.

Everi's grandsons took me with them on their hunting journeys after pig and wallaby, and sometimes I accompanied the war-parties to carry food when they went off to raid some weaker village and add more skulls to the eaves of the houses.

In these expeditions I was not allowed to take a part, for until I was initiated into manhood a spear or a club could not be used by me; but I saw much battle and learned how to creep through the thick jungle without noise so that the spear could fly swift and straight to the unsuspecting quarry.

On one of these journeys I killed my first man—a crinkly-skinned old grandfather who had fled from the village when the warriors rushed it in the early morn, and him I killed with a stone as he lay to drink from a stream.

My adopted brothers rejoiced exceedingly when I told them of my exploit, and on our return to Boborogolo they gave me a disk-club, which I blooded on the victims at the feast.

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* Petticoat.

Much envy did the other youths of the village have for me because I had killed a man and had my club, but I was now a strong young fellow so that I soon beat them into submission.

Everi, my adopted mother, was very proud of me for taking my first head so early, and she boasted much to the other old women, who hated me all the more for so distinguishing myself before their watery-stomached sons, who were mostly older than I. So angry did they become that they fought each other with their garden-sticks—and the fighting-men laughed with much mirth, for old women fight more with their mouths than with weapons.

With the giving of my club I assumed full rights as a fighting man, and, because I had one enemy head, taken by my own hands, the old men decided I should marry.

Now I did not want to marry a woman of Boborogolo, for I held a great anger in my stomach for everything that was of that tribe, so I spoke cunning words and said I would wait a little until I could decide. Thus I threw dust in the eyes of the wise men, who would have made me obey them if they had known what it was I had thoughts of doing in the future.

Though many harvests of yams had been dug since I had been dragged away from my father's village, yet my stomach was troubled and sore, for I wanted greatly to return to my own folk. There was a girl in Dinagolo who would have become a grown woman by now. Often the face of this girl came before my eyes— This is the the habit of young men! But the warriors of Boborogolo were very many and their hands reached far, so that I dared not escape to my own home.

One afternoon I was out on the grassy saddle of a mountain, where the tribe had been hunting wallaby, and from my high position I could see across the valley and down into the bed of the river that flowed far below.

A man appeared on the ridge across the valley, and, as I looked he made the Dinagolo sign of peace—a green branch waved slowly from side to side.

He had apparently mistaken me for a member of his party, for this upland plain was a common hunting-ground of the hill folk, who journeyed from long distances to eat of the juicy flesh of the wallaby, which were very plentiful in this uninhabited region.

Standing on a tall boulder, where he could plainly see me, I returned the signal, and he commenced to climb up the steep hillside to join me.

Imagine my delight when I discovered that the wanderer was my cousin, Korohi, whose father Mudoro was my father's younger brother. We rubbed noses in mutual welcome and sat down together to smoke and give each other the events that had come to us since our last meeting.

My belly was full of happiness to learn that my mother was still alive and strong, though my father had fallen a victim to a raiding party several moons before.

Korohi told me that the girl who had been my playmate in the days before sorrow and trouble reached me from those eaters of filth, the Boborogolo, was still in my mother's house.

"She is now a grown woman," said Korohi, "and many young men desire her, but always she turns her eyes from them and is as a daughter to your old mother."

Many things did we talk of as we rested there among the stems of the tall grass, and my stomach was very glad when I heard the mouth of my cousin utter the news of the alliance that the powerful Nedori people had made with my people. Keboka, a mighty fighting man of Nedori, distantly related through his mother with my father Moliasi, had visited Dinagolo only a few moons before and exchanged his sister for the sister of a Dinagolo man. This is our custom when we wish to cement peace and goodwill with another tribe, and consequently the spears of the Nedori were now available for the protection of their chief's newly made relations.

"This is a very good thing for our people," explained Korohi, "for the Nedori are greatly feared by all the surrounding tribes, as it is Keboka's custom to travel his warriors at night through the dark jungle, so that they swoop down on the sleeping villages of their enemies like a hungry owl on a rat. Even the tribes with more fighting men than his leave him at peace, for the anger of Keboka is a terrible thing."

My body was full of pleasure that such a strong aid had been found by my helpless village, and I talked much with Korohi on the subject of taking payment from the Boborogolo for their past ill treatment of our folk.

"It is as I have made known to you," he concluded. "Keboka has sent the spear around to all his villages, and the warriors have dipped the white feathers in the blood of their arms, so that the point is now glazed with their pledge to raid the enemies of our fathers."

Korohi departed, and I remained full of joy with the anticipation that the day of reckoning for the wrongs of my people was fast approaching. My cousin had told me that he was in company with a number of Keboka's young men, who had been sent to spy on their enemies, and he also said that he would return to this place when the new moon came so that I could be informed what I should do to assist the war-party to enter the abode of our enemies.

THE clouds were massing on the mountains for the afternoon rain as I rejoined my companions in the deep cave among the rocks where we had our camp. Garia, the loud-mouthed son of Wodavi, one of my opponents who had felt the weight of my spear the day before, when he tried to claim a wallaby slain by me as his own prize, was seated before the fire, on which he was roasting a bandicoot. He looked up as I entered and leaned my spear against the mossy wall; then he returned to his cooking, saying in a loud voice—

"The mighty hunter has returned with a clean spear."

The other young men laughed loudly at the sneer, for of all the party I was the only one who had returned without game.

Anger flowed through my veins, for I had never before been without success in the chase, and I felt a great wish to sink my disk-club into his close-cropped head.

"Clean with the blood of harmless animals," I replied, "but sticky with the red fluid of a warrior! Have not I taken the heads of three men in open battle, while you, possessor of the timid belly of an infant, skulk in the rear when there is a man's work to be done."

The men laughed uproariously, but this time the laugh was against the cooker.

Garia plucked a brand from the fire and flung it, and I just dodged the flaming missile in time, while the young man, now on his feet, leaped at me with a bone dagger.

His eyes gleamed red in the firelight, and his face was set with the murderous hate he had fostered so long for me.

I threw myself at his legs and we fell together, he beneath with an arm locked around my neck, while he tried to drive the razor-sharp point of the dagger between my ribs.

I smashed him in the face with a stone from the floor, and with a twist of the wrist wrenched the dagger from him and threw it across the cave. Then I wrestled with him, until I had him pinned as I wished, and gradually forced him back on to the glowing coals.

He shrieked like a fat pig as it feels the knife enter its throat, and a tang of burning flesh filled the air as the flames bit into his quivering hide.

"Let me go! Let me go!" he yelled in agony, while the group of fighters rocked and swayed with fierce laughter at his antics, for it was a good joke to see the live-mouthed one squeal and struggle after his insulting words.

With a final twist on the live coals I hove him, screaming like a snake-startled parrot, on to a pile of banana leaves, where he sobbed and howled like a frightened child until the night fell. His companions yelled with delight at his discomfiture, and we left him to nurse his burns, while we gathered before the fire and filled our stomachs with the flesh our spears had gained during the day. The bandicoot was given to me as my prize, for had I not triumphed over its killer?

It is always thus in these mountains; success brings to the fortunate one all the good things in life, while those whom misfortune follows walk hungry and alone. You, *taubada*, who are of another race and of a different skin to mine, perhaps, have found this so in your own land?

We returned to Boborogolo when the moon waned, every man with a heavy pack of smoke-cured wallaby and cassowary flesh, for the tribal harvest festival was at hand, when all the people would feast and make merry with their friends from other villages.

The tall, carved pillars of the *dubu* were always decorated with the choicest produce of the gardens at these times, and the bananas, taro, sugar-cane, and other foods were piled and hung all about the village, so that our visitors would be impressed with the wealth and strength of the tribe. An orgy of dancing and eating would continue until the whole of the food was exhausted, the guests being sent back to their homes loaded up with gifts of flesh—often the long-pig of man—and vegetables to take them along the track.

Day after day, from early afternoon until near dawn, the tall jungle echoed the roll and thunder of the drums and the hoarse chants and songs of the warriors, songs that had come down to the people from their ancestors. Fierce chants of old-time battles and victories, and songs of ancient hunts and raids, which the sweating dancers roared in mighty voices, while their moving feet, in perfect time with the beat of the drums, raised clouds of dust that hung like a mist over the brown-thatched huts.

The reek of roasting flesh came from the stone-ovens, around which the women and girls busied themselves with tongs of split palm-trunks, packing the food into the holes and covering the pile with armfuls of damp leaves, on which the red-hot stones were raked, another layer of leaves added, then more stones and leaves, and finally topped off with a covering of ashes that filled the hole.*

I took my place with the other young men in the dance, and no voice was louder than mine in the chants, for my adopted brothers' father had taught me the songs and dances of the tribe.

Garia, still with a few unhealed scars from the encounter in the cave, danced in the file of men opposite to me, but he showed no further desire to try conclusions with me again. Wodavi, who had learnt of his son's defeat from the other men, laughed loudly at the tale—but his eyes had a nasty glint as he looked into mine.

There and then I marked him down, along with his cowardly son, as my particular meat when the fighters from Nedori made their visit, for I had been warned by a scout from Keboka that the time was close at hand when they would strike.

While I was gathering sugar-cane and taro in my adopted mother's garden near dusk a few days before the feast, a Nedori man and my cousin Korohi had slipped from the fringe of the jungle and made known to me my share of the raid that was contemplated.

They had visited the hunting-ground for speech with me, but tiring of waiting there they had followed our tracks to the village and hung around hiding in the thick forest until they saw me.

Keboka had given the word to all his adherents that they were to assemble at Dinagolo when the new moon came, and from there they were going to travel by an old fighting track so as to reach their objective the night of the full moon.

The scouts stepped back into the green wall of timber and vanished, while I bundled my burden together and went back to the village.

The feast progressed with great enthusiasm, the visitors from the other villages, in true mountain fashion, expressing their wonder and respect for the hospitality of their hosts and their awe of them as mighty killers of men.

Wodavi and Mugoni orated in turn, each outdoing the other in the boastful expressions he used in describing the power of the tribe and its wealth in gardens and native ornaments of boars' tusks, cassowary plumes, head-dresses and skulls.

"Turn your eyes, you people from the far hills, and gaze upon the heads of our enemies. Have your eyes beheld such a wealth of warriors' skulls in any other place but this, Boborogolo, the home of strong men and mighty fighters since first men walked on these highlands? Let all men hear the name of this abode of brave men and tremble, for like the grains of sand that fill the river-bed are the spears of my young men. Let my voice but give the order and smoking embers will take the place of what are now populous homes of miserable shivering folk who know but have not yet felt the wrath of my people. In my strength I allow them to live, for are they not the two-legged pigs of my warriors? Where did the meat that fills those ovens come from? From the dwellings of those pigs I allow to live so that my fighting men will not be denied the luscious flesh of man," yelled old man Mugoni from the *dubu*-platform to the assembled people.

Loud shouts and roars of applause greeted his speech, the visitors especially registering their public approval of his vain-glorious utterings. For this is the custom that visitors have—in the minority it is dangerous to do anything else.

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*Note:—The food cooked in this manner was never overdone or burnt, for the heat, unlike an ordinary stove or oven, was a steadily decreasing one, so that once the oven was filled it could be left without any further attention until the food was done. AUTHOR.

My stomach was full of mirth when I heard the words of the chief and his chief supporter, for even as he spoke I saw the tip of the full moon above the ragged edge of the trees on the crest of the mountain across the valley.

That afternoon I had taken my old adopted mother, Everi, to her garden, where she would stop until I returned for her; her two grandsons were with the other men, and I could not warn them without spoiling the chances of the raiders. Still, although they were not real brothers of mine, I felt sore in the stomach for them, and I hoped that I could manage to save them from the fury that was close at hand.

The stockade was a tall one, two narrow entrances giving access to the track at each end of the ridge, and these openings were closed at night with logs by the men who were told off for this duty. I had volunteered to attend to this for one of the men, who wanted to dance, so I had no difficulty to face in letting the killers loose when the time came.

The fires glowed red along the path between the houses, and other fires lighted up the open space in front of the *dubu* where the warriors sweated in the exercise of the dance, their towering head-dresses flashing and glistening in the light as they swayed and stepped to the beat of the drums.

The fighting men had laid aside their stone-clubs, and, with the exception of a few spears leaning against the houses, they were unarmed. I sped about and collected as many spears as I could, under the pretense of bringing them forward to the *dubu*, but I could not take them all without causing an argument with some of the men. A mountain man objects to another man taking his spear, so I contented myself with removing those that were within reach, and these I carried to the farther end of the village—the end the attack was to come from.

The moon rode clear and cold above the highest peak, and I began to long for the moment when it would be in the center of the sky, for then I could slip aside and make the sign that the waiting eyes in the jungle looked for.

Slowly the white globe climbed the blue; the dance went on with increased vigor, for the warriors had rested while they ate the contents of an oven that the women had spread before them.

I found myself standing behind Wodavi—and his bare head made my hands itch to swing my club. The old villain turned and spoke—

"Here is a young man who tires with the dance."

And the man beside him laughed with him.

"There will be others who will be very tired, too, before the day returns," I made answer to the grinning old men.

They jeered me again, and I slapped my buttocks at them and rejoined the press of men who were before the *dubu*.

THE white light of the moon lighted up the broad valley so that I could see even the farthest bend of the river where the stream poured its flood over the jagged rocks of a rapid; over on the crest of the opposite ridge the broad leaves of the bananas and the feathery crowns of the sugar-cane glittered like long knives; in the shadow of the jungle I noticed a clump of bushes that had not been there when last I looked that way.

Without haste I made my way to the stockade entrance and removed the logs, and as I lifted the last one from its place I glanced back to the houses to find that nobody had noticed my action.

The next minute I was through the aperture and running fast towards the bushes.

A voice spoke softly from the interior of the clump—

"Is all ready?"

And I answered that the entrance was clear.

A sound of brushing leaves followed my words and I could see the painted bodies of the raiders creeping up to the unsuspecting village. A firestick glowed for an instant against the dark thatch of a house wall, then a lick of flame ran along the dry leaves, and a conch-shell boomed from the edge of the jungle.

Other flames broke out from the nearest houses, and then the war-cry of the Nedori sounded above the tumult of the drums.

Pandemonium followed. Screams of women, the shrill voices of startled children, and the roar of the surprized warriors, as they turned with their drums in hand to fall before the first shower of spears hurled into their ranks by the attackers. Hardly any of the feasters had a weapon handy, and I rocked with mirth as I listened to the curses of the Boborogolo as they rushed about seeking a spear or a club with which to defend themselves.

House after house became a flaming torch until the whole hillside was as bright as day. I looked down into a scene of death. My stomach was glad, for the revenge that my folk had dreamed of was now in sight.

My eyes looked through a red veil and I found myself, my spear and club spattered with somebody's life, pressing hard to force my way through the men of Keboka, who were fighting hard in front of the *dubu*.

I tripped over a body and fell, and as I scrambled to my feet I looked into the face of old Mugoni, his head smashed in from a club-stroke, and a broken spear embedded in his side.

The ranks of the men before me prevented me going forward, so I worked my way around among the houses to come at my enemy Wodavi from the end of the line. Wodavi was somewhere ahead of me, for I could hear him shouting directions to his warriors, who were trying to stand off their attackers while the wily old man cut a way through the stockade through which they could escape to the jungle and, perhaps, safety.

An ax thudded against the posts beyond the last house, and I emerged from the narrow passage under the house to find myself face to face with him whom I had searched for.

Wodavi swung his arm, and a spear swished past my head and stuck quivering into the wall behind me. The old man was very active for he was on me almost as soon as the spear had passed, but I parried the star-shaped club with my spear, and, as he stepped back, I thrust the point at him and took him beneath the left breast. He shrieked like a stuck pig, but I had no ears for his cries and drove my weapon forward until I felt the point grate against the wood of the stockade beyond him. That old man was a fighter, for death had entered his body with my spear-point, but still he tried to smash me with his club, a feeble blow that I easily avoided.

Laughing with the joy of victory, I bore him down to earth with my spear, and as his eyes lost their light I slit his head with a blow from my disk-club. He died very quickly.

Not a word passed between us as we met and fought, and his spirit went to his ancestors with all the hatred and enmity that he and his had had for us men of Dinagolo since the beginning of things. His face was twisted with the murder-lust, and his eyes were drawn upwards like those of a poisonous snake whose back you have broken; the blackened teeth protruding from his tight-drawn lips seemed like fangs.

I raised my foot and kicked him full in the face, and I threw up my head and shouted out the war-cry of my people, for much gladness was mine, for I had taken payment for very many injuries and insults this miserable old man had done me and mine. I left him lying there to be picked up later by the young men and taken to where the stone ovens gaped for their prey.

A spear ripped across my thigh. I turned and dodged the swing of a club that an old man made at me from behind the angle of the house, and as the weapon swung to earth I drove my spear through him. A blow on his head—and I left him to keep Wodavi company until the feast of the following day was made ready.

The fighting was almost over now, for nearly all the Boborogolo were killed or taken prisoner; a few who had taken refuge in three or four tree-houses were still awaiting the attention of the warriors. Only a few houses remained from the flames; smoldering embers and smoking ashes marked the sites of the remainder of the village.

I made my way about the stockade and found groups of my people and their friends from Nedori in charge of the few living Boborogolo, many of whom were wounded and full of the fear of the unpleasant death that they knew was soon to be theirs.

The Dinagolo and Nedori were very proud and boastful over their victory, and many of the younger men nearly came to blows in their efforts to prove to each other exactly how brave and valiant each had been in the fight that had passed.

The prisoners fared very badly when the old men had time to attend to them, for in those days, my father, the tribes were very savage, for they had not yet been taught by the white foreigners the difference between right and wrong. Mercy was unknown to the hill-men, so that it was not strange that they should take these unfortunate ones away to the jungle and break their legs between big logs. This they did to prevent them escaping and also to enable them to have fresh meat for the ovens for many days. Flesh does not keep many hours in the close and warm air among these mountains.

Those miserable folk who had climbed up into the tree-houses did not give us much trouble after we had left them to starve and thirst for a couple of days. They shared the same treatment as the rest of the prisoners.

My stomach was sore when I discovered the bodies of my two adopted brothers among the slain; but it is like that when the spears fly; sorrow is not always with the defeated ones.

But when I had brought my old adopted mother back to the village my stomach became glad again, for she was very full of anger and made much mirth for the warriors, as is the custom of angry old women at these times. Some of the Nedori wanted to kill her, but I spoke to Keboka, and he protected her for me.

Thus it was that several days later when we had burned the remaining houses and the stockade, and destroyed the food-gardens, we left the smoking ashes of Boborogolo behind us and returned to our own people.

Dinagolo and Nedori rejoiced for many days, and many of the old men spoke loudly in praise of me as the cause of their victory over our mutual enemies.

Pleasant words are very nice to the one who is praised, but the laughter of a woman is sweeter than anything else to a young man. The young girl who was in my mother's house had very little to say to me, but her laughter stirred me more even than the loud talk of the leaders of the tribe.

For, my father, I was a very young man, and had not grown wise to the ways of the petticoated ones—if a man ever grows in wisdom in this manner!

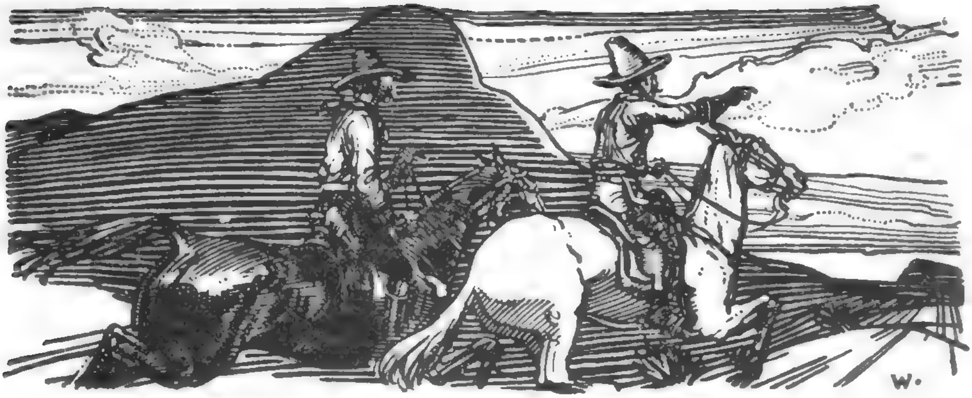
I built my own house and took the girl with the bright face there, and my old adopted mother, Everi, cared for her as a daughter. And much happiness became mine, for many strong sons came to me in the years that followed, so that now I am the grandfather of very many young men and women, and when my time comes to depart to the shadow land much grief and proper respect will follow my passing.

PANDAVA stood up and stretched himself.

"The night mists grow cold, my father, and my old bones crave the comforting warmth of the fire," he remarked.

"And young bones, also, require rest, old man," I replied, "for it has been a long day's march and tomorrow will be even longer."

"*Ba mahuta* (good night), *tamagu*," said the old killer, and sidled over to the sleeping natives around the fire.



A FRONTIER ROBIN HOOD

An Article by Michael J. Phillips

Author of "Pathfinder Without Fame," "Bars of Gold," etc.

THE figure of a man was outlined in the door of the restaurant. The candle light behind him was not bright, but it was sufficient. Two swarthy-faced Californians, diagonally across the narrow street and crouching behind a waist-high adobe wall, turned the muzzles of their rifles silently in his direction. An eager forefinger crept to each trigger.

But as they stooped lower to sight along the barrel, one of the cone-hatted assassins joggled the other with his elbow and put his lips close to his companion's ear.

"Nuh!" he whispered, urgently. "Not Jack Powers; El Capitán Kimberly!"

The second man peered intently. Then, like his friend, he swore under his breath. The oath was half in vexation, half in admiration, and wholly in humorous acknowledgment that the joke was on them. Jack Powers' fabled luck had held again. The outlaw was inside the restaurant. They had trailed him there only a few minutes before. For once he was unattended by his bodyguard of four reckless Californians; he had sauntered out of the gambling-house a few doors away for a bite to eat.

But it was not in the cards that he was to be cut down tonight, even by two good haters who owed him a long score. Superstition daunted them. They lifted the rifles silently from the wall and vanished through the vacant lot. Captain Martin Kimberly, seafaring man, walked off up the street. He did not know how near to death he had been that night.

He was gone but a short time when Jack Powers himself, much like the captain in sturdy erectness, breadth of shoulder and great height, stooped his head to come out of the dingy door. As the outlaw stood under the wooden awning that fronted the restaurant and joined with all the other similar awnings along the rough and stony street, there was a furious tattoo of hoofs from the north. A rider was coming at full speed.

Jack Powers drew a pistol from its holster and waited. The time was the Winter of 1856-57; the place, Santa Barbara, California. The sleepy little Spanish-Mexican town was under the dominance of Jack Powers and his fellows. Some of the officers of the law, it was hinted, were in league with them, or were so thoroughly cowed as to be useless. People retired early, since life and property were not safe abroad after dark. They barred their windows and doors and snuffed their candles.

That is why the hurrying rider drew rein before the restaurant. It was the only one of the line of single-story adobes that showed a light. The horse struck fire on the uneven cobbles as he was brought to a scrambling halt. A man swung out of the saddle and confronted Powers.

One, bold and desperate, gazed into the face of another equally bold and desperate. There was no wavering of the cold, keen

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"A Frontier Robin Hood," copyright, 1924, by Michael J. Phillips.

glance of either, even when dawning recognition turned to certainty. When there came to them the yells and ejaculations of a posse of pursuing horsemen, the newcomer shrugged his shoulders and said gently:

"You must be Jack Powers. Well, they're after me. Can't you hide me somewhere?"

A smile crossed Powers' face.

"You're Ned McGowan," he replied. "You're worth something in San Francisco. What did I hear the reward was—twenty-thousand dollars?"

"Yes; twenty thousand," admitted McGowan, with a touch of defiance. "But it isn't right, Powers! I didn't kill King, of William. Casey did it. But I happened to be wearing my gun that day and when they found that out—well, I've been on the run ever since."

His clothes, of city cut and fine quality, now soiled and torn, showed how stern was the pursuit.

"Maybe you didn't kill King. But you've killed better men," sneered Powers.

The clamor of the pursuers grew nearer. They had turned into the upper end of the street, but two hundred yards away.

There was no fear in McGowan's face, but his spirited reply was hurried:

"You've wiped out a few yourself, if what I hear is true! Are you going to help me, or——"

He made a move as if to pass Powers and enter the restaurant.

"I'll help," returned the bandit, impulsively. "I may need some one to hide me, Powers."

He struck the panting horse a savage blow on the ribs with the butt of his pistol. The animal snorted in pain and astonishment and galloped down the street. Powers shoved the fugitive into the low-ceiled, smoky restaurant ahead of him.

So complete was his rule over the public of Santa Barbara and so greatly was he feared, that it was not necessary to utter a word of warning to the grinning, long-mustached little Californian behind the pine counter. With a hand on McGowan's shoulder he guided him out the rear door of the lean-to shack built against the restaurant. They stood for a moment under the myriads of crisp white stars that spangled a perfect California Winter's night.

They listened. The foremost of the pursuers were actually in front of the restaurant. Some were galloping after McGowan's horse; but others were dismounting. Powers now took the lead and ran swiftly through the rubbish-strewn block, sentineled here and there by huge cactus, prickly pear and Spanish bayonet.

He followed a well-beaten track which led to an adobe house fronted by a veranda, sitting alone on its own side of the block, its back to the upper street. A faint gleam of light could be seen from behind the shutters. Powers knocked in a peculiar manner. Bars were raspingly withdrawn. He slipped inside, followed closely by McGowan.

The light came from a home-made candle and from the glowing fireplace of flat stones and adobe. The men confronted a comely young California woman, attractive despite her slatternly appearance.

"Vigilantes, Manuela," said Powers.

He indicated McGowan with his thumb. "Hide. *Pronto—muy pronto!*"

The young woman's eyes sparkled as if the emergency roused and pleased her, which indeed it did. She was the wife of Pat Dunn, one of Powers' most trusted lieutenants, and her days and nights were filled with alarms. She had grown to love the stimulation which these frequent crises gave her.

"*Si*, Señor Jack!"

She nodded understandingly and glanced about the large room. It did not offer much in the way of concealment and it was the only room of the house, except for a shed which contained fire-wood. Her eyes swept from the bed in the corner, past the wide-mouthed chimney and to the couch along the farther end.

"*Buena!*"

She clapped her hands with something of a child's gleefulness. She could speak no English. She seized McGowan's hand and jerked downward on it. Powers was the first to catch her meaning.

"Smart girl!" he approved, chuckling. "Lie down on the rug, Ned."

Puzzled, McGowan obeyed. It was a large rug, an Indian blanket of thick weave and curious design. Powers and the woman, kneeling, threw its edge over the outlaw's prostrate figure and then rolled him over and over until he was swathed in the heavy, dusty cylinder. Powers tossed it carelessly—its weight meant little to his great strength—into the darkest corner beside the jutting fireplace.

Manuela ran to the table and returned with a guitar, which she thrust into Powers' hands. The man sat down. He struck a chord with slender, tapering fingers that drew music after them as though he had called forth a crystal spring of tinkling water from the hidden depths of a rock.

The girl lifted her skirts coquettishly and swung with the grace and abandon of a Carmen into a dance of Old Spain. But she had scarce taken a dozen steps when the door was thrust open and the room was filled with men.

Men from San Luis Obispo, up-country, with a few from San Francisco; strong, lean, Anglo-Saxon men, with here and there a brilliantly-dressed, dark-faced Californian. They were all heavily-armed and one of them, significantly, dangled a coiled rope.

They did not like Jack Powers. He had to be careful in the town of Saint Louis the Bishop. It was not under his thumb as was Santa Barbara. Muttered threats and lowering looks followed him when he rode or swaggered along the single street; and lowering looks were turned on him now. Powers kept his seat; he continued to strum softly on the guitar. There was an impudent leer on his face.

"We want Ned McGowan," proclaimed the leader, a grizzled man with long, gray hair.

"What's that to me?" was Powers' light, sneering retort.

"We were right behind him. He stopped at the restaurant; the back door was open. He must have gone through. And we saw a light here a minute ago. Some one came in."

Powers waved his hand airily.

"I did. I came to visit with Manuela."

"McGowan was with you!"

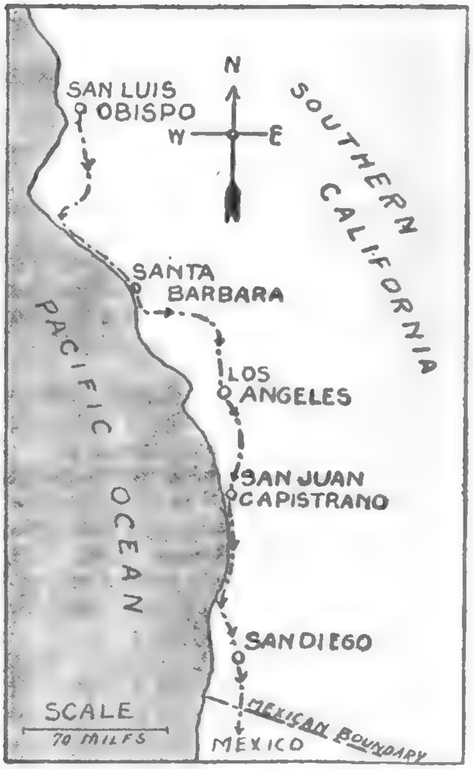
Powers' mocking smile grew broader.

"If he did, where is he? Find him if you can, Fogarty."

The leader stood in baffled thought for a moment, looking from Powers to the dimpling California girl, and back again. The acting of the pair was superb.

Fogarty made a sign, and the posse scattered to the search. They jammed the bulging feather-bed with rifle butts, and looked beneath it. One man overturned the couch. Others streamed out the back door. One carelessly kicked the cylindered rug. Fortunately for McGowan, the Vigilante's foot struck only the empty end, and he investigated no further. It was too obvious to them all that the woman had rolled up the rug and thrown it aside to dance on the smooth earthen floor.

They gathered again in a few minutes, grim and disappointed. Fogarty, arms folded, a long-barreled pistol lying across the crook of his left elbow, looked down steadfastly on Powers. The bandit was picking out an intricate melody on the guitar, smiling slightly as his fingers caressed the strings.



"Maybe he was on that horse that ran away as we came up," said the leader. "We'll soon know. But I don't think so. I think you hid him, Powers."

The low, harsh voice became deadly.

"It's just another notch in the stick against you.

"Too many notches there now. Some day we're coming after you. And when we do—look out."

Powers' sneering good nature was unimpaired.

"Maybe," he agreed. "But when you do come, Fogarty, be careful you don't find me!"

The broad smile persisted. The guitar throbbed softly and steadily. Man after man bent a black gaze upon him as they left the house noisily, the last one slamming the door behind him.

When they had quite gone, Powers struck a final chord with the back of his fingers, laid down the guitar and went out. He reconnoitered, and came back to unroll the rug. McGowan stood up, writhing and scratching.

"The fleas nearly ate me," grumbled the fugitive.

Powers' eyes hardened.

"They're better than the Vigilantes," he retorted, coldly. "One man had a rope. If it hadn't been for that rug, you'd be dancing a hornpipe on air, right now."

"Oh, I'm grateful to you and the *señora*," and he smiled toward Manuela, though he continued to rub his back against the door-jamb. "It was a close squeak, Jack. I won't forget."

"So?" replied Powers, shortly, still unappeased. "I don't see why I didn't give you up and get that twenty thousand."

He eyed the other in icy speculation, as McGowan's hand crept to his pistol-butt. Then Powers shrugged abruptly and smiled.

"I suppose the fleas were pretty bad," he admitted. "Manuela isn't much of a housekeeper. But she is a good friend."

He threw open the back door.

"There's your way, McGowan. Follow the North Star to the Old Mission. It's heavy brush all about. There are caves along the creek behind. They'll shelter you until these fellows go back home and I can send you to Los Angeles."

"They won't find me?" questioned McGowan, doubtfully.

"Nothing'll bother you but the mountain lions and the grizzlies," smiled Powers. "I'll hunt up Pedro Loco * Dominguez and tell him about you. His wife'll feed you. Better go now, before they come back."

There were boisterous shouts of welcome when Powers entered the gambling-house which he had left less than an hour before. Americans and Californians alike joined in the adulation. Chairs were eagerly offered; he selected one at the largest poker-table, where the stacks of chips were highest. The greeting was the breath of his nostrils. He loved his popularity. But for a moment the easy smile left his face and he shuddered. He saw again Fogarty with his thin, hard, gray-stubbled jaws, and heard his low-voiced threat.

* * *

JACK Powers was a mystery. He came to Santa Barbara with Stevenson's Regiment, that company of three-hundred adventurers who had rounded the Horn in a sailing-vessel and landed from whale-boats to garrison the town. They were a year behind Frémont, who had marched over the mountains to take the place bloodlessly in eighteen hundred and forty-six.

The regiment tramped gaily up the narrow, rutted, hillocky State Street, its band playing. The Californians looked on sullenly, though submissively. They knew the war was lost, and the Gringoes now owned California.

There was no fighting and after a time the regiment was disbanded. Many of the men settled in Santa Barbara and vicinity. From the first Jack Powers was a leader among them and their new neighbors.

He was a good-looking, gallant youth, who made friends as easily as he breathed. And they were friends who did not desert him in time of need. He laughed and joked. He sang and played in a way that won the hearts of the Californians, themselves no mean musicians. He was a wonderful rider, getting untold miles out of a horse in a day, despite his considerable weight. The girls brightened expectantly when they saw him coming. The poor were sure of largess when Jack Powers was about. He always had money, and he gave it away like a prince. He was a veritable Robin Hood of the frontier.

Jack Powers gambled, and was lucky. He traveled from town to town when the pickings grew poor. His face was familiar in San Luis; in San Jose; in San Francisco; in the handful of adobe houses that then composed Los Angeles; in San Diego; in the sparse and sun-baked towns of Baja California.

Though he was lucky, those who traveled the same road were not. Men with gold in their money-belts started with him and his dark-faced attendants and failed to appear at their destinations. Drovers from San Francisco who wandered from ranch to ranch down the state, buying great herds of cattle which they transported overland to northern markets, had a way of dropping out of sight.

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* Crazy Pete.

There were many to note, though few to investigate. The convulsion of war between Mexico and the United States had passed. But the law of the old order was overturned and the law of the new was not established. Gold was discovered in 'Forty-nine, and the territory was stormed by hot-eyes Bor-es—the colloquial name for Americans, used to the exclusion of Gringo in some places—hastening by ox-team and clumsy wagon to the diggings. All was excitement, ferment, unrest.

Jack Powers' evil repute steadily grew. At first he was not connected actually with any major crime. Those who saw such crimes, if they survived, were afraid to tell of them. But a blight of death surrounded him.

Smiling and debonair, Powers would throw his spurred boot over the saddle of a good horse to dismount among his cronies in Santa Barbara. Hours later a messenger on a lathered mount would gallop into town with the news that a traveler had been found murdered and robbed north of Arroyo Grande. It did not seem humanly possible that man carried by horse flesh could so far outrun the courier. But—there was Jack Powers, and there was always the news of crime following after like the shadow of a vulture's wing.

The bellowing 'Forties and the early 'Fifties passed and they grew to understand how it was done, though no man did more than whisper his knowledge. They knew that Powers was an organizer without peer in his time and kingdom. He had a band of at least forty men scattered over the entire territory. Many of them were persons of standing, reputation and influence in their communities.

Jack had three main headquarters—a small tract at San Antonio Rancho, adjoining the Santa Barbara Mission lands; and others many miles above and below the central rallying-point.

At these places there was always a squad of cut-throats, waiting the summons of their master, spending the time in drinking, gambling, dancing, and in minor forays of their own. Swift horses stood saddled day and night, ready to respond to the sudden and imperious needs of the ruler. There were other similar stations on this "underground railroad" of Powers'; though they were not so well known. The fact was that he could scarcely be set down afoot anywhere between San Francisco and San Diego without finding himself a mount within two hours.

He had an intelligence, a courier and a commissary department in the north and another in the south. Each branch had its "on-the-wing" men who ranged and roved, and its "on-the-quiet" members who stayed at home, mainly, and gathered useful information. The officials of Santa Barbara and some other towns were rotten with allegiance to Powers and disloyalty to their oaths. This was partially due to caution. For enemies of Jack, even secret enemies, were apt to be overcome by violence and overtaken by disaster.

One of Powers' historic feuds was with Don Nicolas Den, who owned the San Antonio tract near Santa Barbara which Powers had preempted for his own uses. Naturally Don Nicolas, who was an honorable and respected citizen, did not fancy a blood-stained bandit for a neighbor, and so stated. This started ill-feeling.

During the middle period of Powers' reign, titles throughout California were imperiled while a Federal Commission groped through the mazes of the Mexican grants, deciding which were valid and which were not. It was a time of squatter sovereignty. Jack Powers, minded to become a landed proprietor and arrogant in his strength, seized the College Rancho of the Santa Ynes Mission, forty miles above Santa Barbara.

The rancho, property of the church, was well-stocked with horses and cattle. Thousands of them dotted the rich and rolling grazing-lands of the Valley of The Santa Ynes. Cattle were worth at the *rancheria* from fifty to one hundred dollars per head, since the rush to the gold-diggings and the growth of San Francisco created eager markets.

At about the time Powers took possession of the ranch, responsible church authorities closed a ten-year lease with Don Nicolas Den for the property. Den, accompanied by a party of friends, including two Indians, escorted Sheriff W. W. Twist to the rancho to serve ejectment papers on the bandit.

Powers was preparing to stand a rodeo in order to deliver one thousand head of cattle to a purchaser, and was taken completely by surprise. He was hot-headed, and brave to the point of foolhardiness, but he offered no resistance. He gave possession. One of Den's friends, young Tom Meehan, was placed in charge of the vast property.

Don Nicolas went back to town. Warnings of Powers' displeasure were continually reaching him. Threats and insults came from Powers' hangers-on. Friends guarded the Den home at night. The Don received a letter by messenger from his superintendent. The Indian who brought it crept stealthily in under cover of the dark. There were but a few lines:

> They are after me. There are matters I should see you about, but I cannot reach the town. I have started many times, but they are always waiting.

It was only two days later that Meehan's body was found on top of Refugio Pass, and three of Powers' bullies strutted into town, rifles on shoulders, to give themselves up. They claimed self-defense, and were promptly discharged by a complaisant justice of the peace. And yet the inquest, held in Don Nicolas' stable, revealed thirty bullet wounds in Meehan—all in the back! The boy had been riddled from behind.

Don Nicolas, at that, decided to fight the battle with Powers through. He announced he would ask for another writ of ejectment, this one aimed at Powers' possession of San Antonio. The bandit, in a towering rage, went to the Den home to voice his defiance, perhaps to end the dispute for all time.

For with Powers it was a blow and a bullet. He strode to the door of the *sala*, and warned Don Nicolas the writ must not be issued. Don Nicolas defied him. Powers, wearing a pistol at either hip, rushed at the citizen. His clenched fists were upraised, his face contorted with passion.

Donña Rosa Den, young, beautiful and charming, probably saved her husband's life. He was unarmed; he was not a large man; he could only wait Powers' attack. But at the loud words the *dona* stepped from another room to stand beside her husband. She spoke quietly in Spanish:

"*Que secede*, Señor Powers?" *

Powers halted abruptly his savage advance. His hands unclosed, dropped. Over his face came a look of shame and contrition. He bowed low, a bow unknown to rough and ready California, and one that savored of far-off drawing-rooms. And without a word he withdrew.

Den watched the change and the retreat in astonishment. When his wife turned to him and said: "That young man is of gentle breeding, Nicolas," he readily agreed.

"Jack Powers' Rebellion" broke out soon after. Jack went from Den's house to the sheriff's office to warn Twist against the issuance of the writ. The sheriff had served in Stevenson's Regiment, too, and he was as brave as Powers. He declared that the writ should be issued, and named the day when it would be served.

On the morning of that day Powers and a large band of followers, mainly native Californians of Spanish and Indian descent, rode up to the large adobe house in which the sheriff lived and took station across the street. None in the town could be depended on, and Twist summoned the county citizens as deputies. When he came out to lead his posse the Powers faction, with yells of defiance, galloped back and forth on their horses and fired in the air.

As Twist mounted, Alejo Leyva, one of Powers' men, fired twice and the sheriff fell, shot through the arm and side. A general battle followed. Several were wounded and Millhouse, an American follower of Jack's, was mortally hit. The sheriff's deputies, without a leader, scattered; and Powers remained in possession.

For the time he owned the town. The victors galloped up and down the streets, firing promiscuously and shouting challenges. Or they thronged the bars where they were obsequiously served by fellow-Californians. A big dance was given that night in Powers' honor. It lasted until daylight.

But even prostrate Santa Barbara came to feel that Powers had gone too far. There was general satisfaction when Leyva's body was found a few mornings later with several knife wounds in it. Powers sensed the waning of his popularity. In his boyish eagerness for applause and a restoration to favor he made the impulsive gesture toward a fellow-bandit which saved Ned McGowan's life—at the expense of twenty-thousand dollars to the savior.

POWERS waged unrelenting warfare on Don Nicolas. The latter never stirred out unless he had a bodyguard. He had many narrow escapes of which he learned. There were others, doubtless, that were never told.

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* "What is happening, Mr. Powers?"

One evening at the twilight hour Don Nicholas sat on a davenport in his home. It faced two large windows at the front of the house. Beyond was the veranda, supported by square, heavy pillars. His wife sat close on one side of him, his sister on the other. The light within the room was shifting and uncertain, and each minute the shadows gathered more thickly.

Suddenly, the *doña* felt her husband's body grow rigid, and she waited in breathless anxiety for him to speak. When the words did come they were in the lightest of whispers.

"Don't look toward the windows and don't move. Some one is trying to aim from behind the pillars."

The women quietly drew closer to him, smiling and chatting as they had been, though the awful fear was at their hearts. It was either life or death, and a few minutes would decide it. At full dusk the Indian page-boy would enter with the unlighted candles. Before kindling them at the fireplace he would close the shutters. If Don Nicolas lived until the bullet-proof barriers fell to, he was safe.

The *don* watched the flitting shadows steadily. He spoke in his usual accents, and once or twice laughed naturally. The page entered, set down the candles slowly, while the women clung in an agony of suspense to Nicolas, and proceeded to the windows. They held their breath, but there was no shattering explosion. The waiting rifles were not fired.

Doña Rosa went to the store of Mr. Hatch in the Arellanes house next morning. She passed a group of men lounging about the entrance. As she stood at the counter one of them came inside and spoke to her.

"You are Doña Rosa, the wife of Don Nicolas?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me who takes care of your husband—God or the Devil?"

She recognized the questioner, who spoke perfect Spanish. It was Pat Dunn, Jack Powers' right-hand man. Looking him fearlessly in the eye, she replied:

"I do not know, though I think it is the good God. And I hope He will continue His watchful care."

The desperado's sombrero had been jammed down on his head during the dialogue. He raised it and said—

"You are a very brave woman."

Turning, he walked out of the store.

Sometimes suspense was relieved by stirring action. Don Nicolas was returning from his Dos Pueblos rancho, up-country, late one afternoon. With him was an Indian, Angel, and Eugenio Garcia. They approached Arroyo Del Burro—The Dry Creek Of The Asses—on the outskirts of Santa Barbara, as the sun was setting.

Arroyo Burro is a narrow defile above the sea, and between high hills. At that time the only passage of the steep *barranco* was a narrow, crooked and broken trail, barely wide enough for two horses at careful speed. As they entered the defile Angel's quick ears caught a whistle from the dense underbrush on the left bank some distance ahead. The answering signal came from the opposite bank.

It meant that Powers and his gang were entrenched to ambush them. If they retreated there was a long and troublesome detour along which other traps could easily be set. If they went ahead it meant, apparently, certain death.

They paused to talk it over. To give their stopping an air of naturalness, Garcia drew out his "mecha" to light a cigar. Getting a mecha into action was a long and complicated process, but they welcomed its slowness now. As they spoke in low tones, Angel raised his head.

"I hear horsemen—" he paused while his lips moved silently—"six horsemen, galloping up from behind us."

"If they're Powers' friends, we're done," said Don Nicolas, coolly, as he loosened his pistol in his belt and drew his rifle from the saddle-boot. "Let's meet them—at the gallop!"

The three men wheeled their horses and dashed back, hoping to catch the supposed bandits in rear offstride. But they were happily surprized, for the wayfarers were Don Tomas del Valle, a *compadre* of Don Nicolas, and five of his *vaqueros* returning from the north where they had sold a band of cattle.

The situation was explained. Don Tomas proposed a plan which would have been suicidal had not all of the nine been splendid horsemen mounted on good animals, and with unfaltering courage. They agreed to it instantly when Don Tomas ceased speaking.

They grouped themselves closely about Don Nicolas, so that it was impossible for a bullet to reach him without first striking some of the escort. And then, at high speed, they plunged into the narrow and tortuous defile.

Excited horses, with nostrils distended, bounded from rock to rock on the slopes on either side of the trail, where horses had never trod before. Chasms were leaped by the gallant outriders, the dry earth crumbling from thespurning hoofs into the arroyo-bed far below. Boulders were loosened, so that they rolled and clashed into the path, and clouds of dust accompanied the riders.

Many heads rose in amazement from behind the barriers that hedged the trail, but not a shot was fired. The cavalcade swept on at the gallop and never slackened speed until, with exulting cheers, it stopped in front of Don Nicolas' home.

CAME the year eighteen hundred and fifty-seven, and Jack Powers found his kingdom shrinking. Only Santa Barbara alone remained truly loyal. San Francisco cleaned house by wiping out many of his kind, the self-styled "Hounds." San Luis Obispo's hatred of him grew. Los Angeles executed her gamblers and badmen, or imprisoned them, or chased them out of town. He was not welcome there.

It was in June of 'Fifty-seven that a peculiarly revolting crime was committed by Powers and his *bravos*. A rancher living near San Luis had returned from the gold-diggings, presumably with a heavy stake. A crowd of men rode up to the house at night and wiped out the family of five. Only an aged shepherd, who hid himself in a ditch and so passed unnoticed, was left to tell the story.

The shepherd recognized Powers, Rafael Monea and Pio Linares. He told how, when one of the raiders hesitated, a trace of mercy in his heart, over the murder of the baby of the family, a companion said harshly:

"If you don't kill him, he will hang us all! He dies—or you do!"

And the child's brains were dashed out against a wall.

The countryside, all that stretch of rolling range and bouldered river-bottom and tumbling mountains from as far north as the King City of today to Los Angeles on the south, seethed with the news. It ought to have been enough to start Fogarty and his stern San Luis men on the trail. But Powers disappeared and they did not know where to look for him. They hesitated to ride on Santa Barbara, since this might have meant war between the *pueblos* and many other lives would be lost.

Jack was in Santa Barbara in August of 'Fifty-seven when two brothers, Basques, stopped at the Wells-Fargo express office to get a large amount of money they had left there for safekeeping. They were on their way home with many cattle. Enroute to Ventura on the south they had deposited the gold, mostly in thick, six-sided slugs, guaranteed as to weight, fineness and value by the stamp of a San Francisco trading firm.

Judge Maguire was Wells-Fargo agent. The brothers asked for a room where, unseen, they might fill their money-belts, and he remonstrated with them.

"Let me send this gold to San Francisco for you," he urged. "Our stages will take it through. We'll pay you if they don't. But you are marked men. It is a rough country filled with outlaws from here to San Jose."

The Basques were tall and powerful. They had been buying cattle for years and were accustomed to protecting their property and their persons. They laughed at Maguire, pointing out their strength and experience, and the fact that there were eight *vaqueros* accompanying their "partida," or cattle-drove. They did not know that every *vaquero* was a member of Jack Powers' band.

The attack, led by Powers himself, came at night at San Juan Bautista. The *vaqueros* started it by treacherously stampeding the cattle. During the confusion that followed, Jack and his men, shooting and yelling, rode down on the Basques.

It was not an easy victory. Two of the bandits met death. Jack's fine black horse, the animal he loved above all others, and which often had carried him out of danger, was killed under him. But the Basques were shot, dragged down and knifed, and the heavy money-belts torn from their bodies.

A messenger came hastily next morning to Don Nicolas Den's Dos Pueblos rancho, where Doctor James Barry was in attendance on Dona Rosa, at that time very ill. There was an injured man at a ranch to the north, he said; and would the doctor come at once?

The doctor went, and found Jack Powers

with a bullet-hole in his leg. The bandit asked that it be dressed, explaining that the injury was due to a boil which he had neglected. The doctor's lip curled at this attempt to deceive, but he dressed the leg without comment. In payment he was given an hexagonal slug of gold, stamped with the name of a San Francisco firm.

The doctor told his story, and Fogarty and his men strapped on cartridge-belts and saddled up. There was actual evidence at hand now. With the murder of the Basques there was at last a united sentiment behind them. It was the thing which definitely made Jack Powers unbearable. And they thought they knew where to lay hands on Powers, wounded.

Rage and indignation burned like a prairie-fire as messengers rode north and south, spreading the news. Every Powers stronghold was raided, and every man found in them died with his boots on. If he did not succumb in the attack, he was shot or hanged after a hasty trial.

Santa Barbara responded nobly to the call. It came out in a body to head off the gang who had killed the Basques, and who had fled south before the vengeful San Luis men. Led by "Venado" Rodriguez—*venado* means deer, and he was so called because he was swift of foot—the man-hunters spread over the jungled plain and foot-hills between the mountains and the sea.

The bandits fought their way through the line. It was a running battle then for six miles. On the site of the present town of Summerland, three were captured alive. One other was shot by Venado and in dying revenged himself by killing Rodriguez as he dismounted to take the prisoner.

Two others remained. They plunged into the sea. The Californians ran along the shore, firing at the swimmers. One was drowned very soon. The other drove well out beyond the breakers, and his body was found later, miles below. The three captives were taken to Santa Barbara, tried, and shot within a few days. The whole town witnessed the executions.

Jack Powers' wound was not serious, and he and Rafael Monea escaped. The ride they made throws many an historic ride of good repute into shadow. Their hidden relays of horses served them well. They clattered down the territory of California, over mountain and plain, for more than three hundred miles at full gallop. Pursuers were always at their heels. They fought their way through *pueblos* suddenly grown hostile, for messengers had gone before.

They never rested, night or day, for more than seventy-two hours. The handsome, dashing young Spaniard was as good a rider as Jack, and Californians of the day could give no higher praise than that. Once he ran for two miles with his hand on Jack's saddle, after his own horse had died under him.

But they escaped. They tore over the unmarked boundary-line and into the sanctuary of Baja California, where trails were few and the simple people were friendly. Below San Diego the baffled pursuers gave up the chase and returned to their homes.

The two desperadoes located in a small *pueblo*, where they lived like kings. They still had the heavy money-belts, and one gold-piece kept them in luxury for months. But time hung heavily. There were no gamblers worthy of their prowess, no rich travelers in this obscure peninsula to tempt them to the road.

On *fiestas* the whole population of the village, including the fugitives, went out to a grove of sycamores and live-oaks by a perpetual stream, to spend the day in singing and dancing and eating and drinking. On one such occasion, when they had been in the country for half a year, Powers and Rafael quarreled over a girl, and the American flashed his gun.

They abused each other in violent language while Powers, for some unknown reason, forebore to fire. The village people, alarmed, ran away to a considerable distance, and then stopped to watch. They heard Monea shout:

"You're afraid, Powers! The pistol is the tool of the coward. Why don't you fight with a knife, like a brave man?"

They saw Powers hesitate. Then, with a curse, he threw down his pistol violently, whipped out his knife and began circling and feinting about the snarling Monea, similarly armed. The villagers ran quite away then, for they feared the wrath of the survivor, whichever he might be.

It was hours later when they came back timidly to a dreadful sight. Both men had been wounded to the death, and a drove of wild hogs had partially eaten the bodies.

Powers and Monea were buried where they had fallen, without benefit of clergy. They were so bad that the people would not call the *padre*. The contents of the money-belts were divided equally among the villagers.

With the passing of their most picturesque and magnetic leader, the remaining bandit gangs which had terrorized California for a decade were broken up. Unrest was stilled when the Federal commission rendered decisions on land-grant titles, and illegal squatters were ousted.

The clicking telegraph instrument wakened the sleeping *pueblos*, for behind the sound they felt the pulse of the great republic of which they were now a part. There came to the territory the reign of law.

INDIAN TRIBES OF MISSOURI

by Raymond W. Thorp

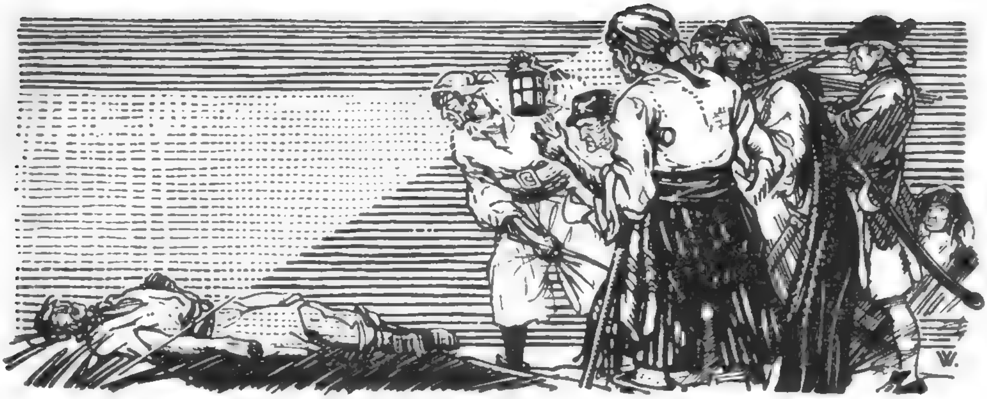
MISSOURI, unlike many states, never had a large number of Indians, Indian tribes, or warlike chiefs of ability. The Osage Indians were the only tribe peculiar to and historically native in Missouri. The "Missouris," who took their name from the river, were living there when Marquette and Joliet made their famous trip in 1673, but they had orginally come there from the vicinity of Green Bay, Wisconsin. They were never a strong tribe. As early as 1702 their number was estimated at only two hundred families, and in 1805 they numbered only three hundred souls. In 1829 they were found with the Oto, in Nebraska, and numbered only eighty and in 1885 there were only forty individuals remaining.

Other Indian tribes in Missouri came late, as the Sauks, Foxes, and Delawares. These originated east of the Mississippi and settled in Missouri during the Spanish period.

The Osages were the distinctive Indians of Missouri, and well might the state be proud of them. The great artist, Catlin, states that the Osages were "the tallest race of men in North America, either of red or white skins." Few Osage braves were under six feet in height, many were six feet and six inches, and some were seven feet tall. They were well-proportioned and good looking, and in movement they were quick and graceful. In war and the chase they equalled any. Although living close to the white man for decades they late retained their primitive customs and dress.

The Osages shaved the head and decorated and painted it with great care. They cut and slit the ears and profusely ornamented them. The Osages are mentioned on Marquette's map of 1673 as living on the Osage river, where they are also placed by all subsequent writers until their removal westward in the nineteenth century. The name Osage is a French corruption of the Indians' real name, Wazhazhe—variously spelled Wa-saw-see and Wos-sosh-e—which of these traders were common before 1719, the first official French visit was made in that year by Du Tisne. The Osages were divided into several tribes and villages, and had seven hundred and fifty warriors in 1804, besides six hundred in the Arkansas band. Even as late as 1830 their total population was over 5,000.

On November 10, 1808, by a treaty with the United States Government at Fort Clark, near Kansas City, Missouri, the Osages ceded all their lands east of a line running due south from Fort Clark to the Arkansas River. They later ceded their Missouri land lying west of this line. They are today the richest single class of people in the world, their wealth averaging over one thousand dollars per person.



PORTO·BELLO·GOLD

Conclusion

by Arthur D. Howden Smith

Author of "Swain's End," "Swain Jarl-Maker," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

I WAS in the counting-room talking with Peter Corlaer, the chief of our fur-traders, when the bond-boy, Darby McGraw, ran in.

"The Bristol packet is in, Master Robert," he cried. "And, oh, sir, the watermen do say there be a pirate ship off Sandy Hook!"

I went with the news to my father, whom I found in the company of Master Clinton, the Governor of the Colony of New York. They were great friends, despite the fact my father once had been a Jacobite. We reached them just as Captain Farraday, the master of the Bristol packet, was telling his story.

"Chased?" he cried to my father. "That I was, Master Ormerod, by the pirate frigate *Royal James*."

"That would be the vessel of the fellow known as Captain Rip-Rap," observed my father; and there was a quality in his voice and manner which led me to think that he labored in the grip of some strong emotion.

"True for you, Master Ormerod," answered Captain Farraday. "A complete rogue, but a man of exquisite dress and manners. And moreover as arrant a Jacobite as ever was. He works with John Flint, who is no less of a rascal, albeit rougher. Flint sails in the *Walrus*. Between them they ha' the metal to hammer a brace of King's ships."

Captain Farraday stopped for breath, and Governor Clinton seized the opportunity to ask with a smile:

"Captain Rip-Rap did you call your pursuer? What manner of name is this?"

"He is singularly partial to that mixture of snuff," answered Captain Farraday. "I am told his own men give him that name, for even they do not know that to which he was born. 'Tis said he was a gentleman who suffered for his political convictions."

Later, when we were alone in the counting-room—Peter, my father and I—they told me the secret they shared with Captain Rip-Rap. He was Andrew Murray, my mother's uncle.

"But," I cried, "he was the great trader who conducted the contraband trade with Canada. 'Twas he whom you and Corlaer and the Iroquois fought when you broke down the barriers of the Doom Trail and won back the fur-trade for our people. Why, 'twas then you—and——"

I knew the deep feeling my father still had for my long-dead mother, and I scrupled to stir his memories.

Next morning I took Darby with me to make a business call on Captain Farraday. As we walked along the water-front we saw a Spanish frigate and a battered little brig at anchor, the latter with a cannon-shot hole in her side. A one-legged sailor who said that he was off the latter vessel introduced himself as Long John Silver and told us a thrilling story of how the ship had been pursued by Rip-Rap. He was so ingratiating that I lent him Darby to guide him to his destination, the Whale's Head Tavern.

By the time I had finished my business on board the Bristol packet the afternoon was gone. I was on my way back to the counting-house when I was stopped by a group from the Spanish ship.

"Sir," said a young lady whom they were escorting, "can you direct me to the Whale's Head Tavern?"

She appeared to be the last sort of woman who might be expected to have anything to do with this noted resort of bad characters. Matters grew clearer when she explained that she sought her father, Colonel O'Donnell, a Jacobite exile in the service of Spain. I not only guided her to the tavern, but went inside to tell the colonel that his daughter awaited him. There I found Darby, with Long John and a couple of his cronies, known as Bill Bones and Black Dog. The boy obviously was captivated by Long John's tales of the sea. Silver volunteered to find O'Donnell for me. He professed not to know the Irishman, but had no difficulty in locating him.

That evening after dinner we had a call from Captain Rip-Rap. He spoke of "launching the coup of his career," one which "will echo in thronerooms and chancelleries," and announced that I was his heir and that as such he wanted me to be his assistant. I refused to go. Immediately a gang of his men entered with Long John at their head. Darby McGraw, his head turned by Silver's alluring tales, had joined the pirates and as his first lawless act had let them into the house. As they trussed me up, Peter insisted on going too, and they obliged him—"your muscles should prove useful," observed my great-uncle, noting his tremendous strength.

The pirates rowed out to the brig and took us aboard. My great-uncle had a short conversation with O'Donnell regarding a Spanish ship, the *Santissima Trinidad*, the full purport of which I did not understand. I did gather, though, that there was a Jacobite plot afoot, as a detail to which O'Donnell and his daughter were to be taken off the Spaniard and become the guests of Murray on his pirate vessel. But how? Why? When? Where?

Well, O'Donnell went back at last to his Spanish frigate, and we put to sea. Once the pirates had us where we couldn't escape, our bonds were removed and Silver became his hypocritically unctuous and expansive self. Among other things I learned from him that the brig had been especially captured for this visit to New York; that its original crew of honest men had been murdered, and that as soon as we came up with the *Royal James* and the *Walrus*, this vessel was to be sunk and the prime ruffians who now temporarily manned it were to be retransferred to their original stations on the two pirate craft. Silver told me all this while acting as lookout for the helmsman, a horrible blind villain named Pew who steered by the feel of the wind in the sails.

As we three talked on, the sailing-master, Bill Bones, came along and picked a fight with Peter Corlaer. Seasick though he was, the huge Dutchman still had strength enough to take Bones' knife away from him and haul him over the halyard, where Peter proceeded to reeve a landsman's slipnoose. Bones was saved from being hanged by my great-uncle, who told him that another infraction of discipline would result in his being keel-hauled.

NEXT day we met the *Walrus* and the *Royal James*, blew up the pirated brig and transferred the crew to their respective ships, all according to plan. Peter and I were taken aboard my great-uncle's ship, while Silver, Darby McGraw, Bones, Pew and Black Dog were among those returned to Flint's command.

My great-uncle was now prepared to talk over his "coup" with Flint.

"During our Spanish cruises," he said, "I established connections with a group of Jacobite gentlemen who can tell me when and from what port this year's royal treasure-ship will sail for Spain. I have just finished arrangements with my principal confederate, whom I met in New York. It simply remains for us to execute the plan."

The treasure amounted to one million five hundred thousand pounds. Murray announced that it was to be divided thus: One hundred thousand pounds to himself as author of the scheme; seven hundred thousand to the two ships, and seven hundred thousand to the confederates. Flint was to stay hidden in the harbor of the pirates' rendezvous at Spyglass Island—known also as Treasure Island—while the *Royal James*, masquerading as a King's frigate, was to cruise for the treasure-ship. Peter and I were to remain in Flint's hands as hostages against Murray's return. Flint cursed at the terms, but he had to take either them or nothing.

After Flint had departed my uncle confided further details to me. The treasure-ship was the *Santissima Trinidad;* the Jacobite confederates were represented by Colonel O'Donnell, and the money was to be used to restore Bonnie Prince Charlie to the throne of England. As inspector of fortifications of the Spanish ports on the Main, O'Donnell had learned that the *Trinidad* was to sail from Porto Bello; and now he undertook to learn the closely guarded secret of her exact sailing-date, to take passage on her with his daughter, using the King's business as a pretext thereto, and to send all necessary information on to us in advance by an another confederate. When we had captured the *Trinidad* we were to take him and his daughter on board and make off for Treasure Island to divide the plunder and concert arrangements for delivering their share to O'Donnell's friends. The *Trinidad* was to be scuttled with all on board. I vetoed this last barbarity, and instead we agreed that Murray in his rôle of the pirate Captain Rip-Rap was to make a pretense of bearing off the girl as booty and of imprisoning the father to silence his objections.

We changed our course to bring us to Treasure Island, where we careened and refitted the *Royal James*. Flint's crew refused to do such menial work upon the *Walrus*, so my great-uncle kept them out of mischief by having them build a fort. When all was in readiness Murray turned Peter and me over to Flint and prepared to sail on the morning tide.

BUT my heart failed me at the thought of the fate which that innocent girl Moira, who was to be taken aboard with the treasure, might have to face should Murray play false or should our plans go astray. So that night Peter and I escaped and stowed away on the *Royal James*, with the connivance of Ben Gunn, the ship's steward.

The pirating of the *Trinidad* was readily accomplished, and we were able to effect the removal of O'Donnell and his daughter to the *James* without arousing suspicion among the Spaniards. Then, because he did not trust Flint, my great-uncle decided that, before he returned to Treasure Island, he would bury the seven hundred thousand pounds due O'Donnell and his friends, as well as his own personal share of one hundred thousand. He had it unloaded on the Dead Man's Chest, a small island south of Porto Rico in the Virgin Group, left O'Donnell, Moira, Peter and me to hide it, and sailed off, promising to return for us in five days. We concealed it in a spot where the dense jungle growth would soon render its discovery impossible to all save those who had an exact chart showing its whereabouts.

IN DUE course Murray returned for us, and the *Royal James* set sail for Treasure Island, where we divided the rest of the loot evenly with Flint and his men. They attempted a night attack on us, but we were ready for them; we gave the *Walrus* two broadsides at close range, cut our cable and put to sea with the intention of outsailing Flint when he pursued, forcing him to beach, and recovering the treasure that he and his men had forfeited by their treachery. In the incidental cannonading which accompanied this maneuver O'Donnell was killed; but the maneuver itself was proceeding prosperously until a sudden Caribbean hurricane arose and forced us back into harbor badly battered and leaking like a sieve. Flint returned after us; and as we were in no condition to fight our ship, Murray gave orders to transfer the *Royal James'* crew and its treasure to the fort which Flint had so obligingly built.

Flint tried an assault; but we had no trouble in keeping his men at bay until we lost our two leaders. Pew stabbed Murray; and Silver finished Coupeau the gun-pointer with the spear-like point of his crutch.

Then our men all deserted, and there was nothing left for Peter Corlaer and me to do but to retreat to the blockhouse where Moira O'Donnell was, Peter carrying Murray over his shoulder. At the blockhouse we barricaded ourselves with casks and boxes containing the treasure and put ourselves in the best posture possible to repulse attack.

CHAPTER XX

PRISONERS

"AHOY, the blockhouse!"

Moira stayed her weeping, and I rose from my knees as the hail thundered from the night.

"Dot's Flint," whispered Peter. "You talk to him, Bob, *ja*."

"What is it?" I shouted back.

"Is Murray with ye?"

"He's dead," I answered after a moment of reflection.

"And that's —— —— lucky for him! Here's Tom Morphew ready to give him a taste of the cat."

A shrill howl echoed the words.

"Don't 'ee believe mun, Cap'n Flint! 'Tis all a lie! And 'ee promised I should ha' t' beatin' o' mun."

" 'Tis true," I said wearily. "After sunrise you can send in a man to see for himself."

"Ah!" jeered Flint. "But ye see I'm not waiting for sunup or moonset or aught else, my Buckskin. We know how many o' ye there are; and if ye don't surrender, why, we'll put a torch to the blockhouse and roast ye out. Fire won't hurt gold and silver, but 'tain't friendly to live meat."

" 'Twill cost you somewhat first," I retorted.

"Not so much as ye might think."

"Dot's right," squeaked Peter beside me. "*Ja*, you better make a bargain wit' him, Bob."

"A bargain," I repeated. "What on earth can we bargain with?"

"Der treasure on der Dead Man's Chest."

"But that is——"

I turned to Moira.

"In a manner of speaking, that treasure is yours. 'Twas in your father's name, to be held in trust for others. Are you willing——"

"My faith, any cause will be the better without it," she interrupted. "What has it done but bring bloodshed and suffering upon all who trafficked in it? If it will just win us our lives, Bob, 'twill be the one good deed to its credit."

"Time's runnin' short," shouted Flint. "If ye won't surrender we'll start the fagots."

"Suit yourself," I replied with as much confidence as I could muster. "There are three of us here, and 'tis we know where the treasure lies on the Dead Man's Chest. If you won't even promise our lives we'll make the bitterest fight we can and carry the secret with us."

There was a gabble of protest at this, several others joining their voices to Flint's, among them Silver.

"Naught's been said o' slayin' ye," declared Flint. "Give up the treasure, and we'll part friends."

"Aye, aye, Master Ormerod," called Silver. "Cap'n Flint puts it straight. There ain't a man of us would wish to be your enemy."

I looked hopelessly at Peter.

"What more can we win?" I asked. " 'Tis a mockery to place credence in their promises."

"*Ja*," nodded Peter. "We don't trust 'em. But we know dot, Bob. We don't be fooled. Andt now anyway we get off alive. Afterwards——"

He shrugged his mountainous shoulders.

"If we do but get off this terrible island we are that much improved in our circumstances!" exclaimed Moira. "Glory, but I'll wear the skin from me knees when I see another woman's face—not that I'm ungrateful to the two of ye here, that are as brave cavaliers as any maid ever owed her all to."

What she said set me to pondering again, and I called to Flint—

"Mistress O'Donnell must have every consideration she is accustomed to, with decent lodging in the cabin and we two to attend her."

"Gut me!" roared Flint. "D'ye think we conduct a nunnery aboard the *Walrus?*"

"I am thinking she is a young maid by her lone, which is hard enough, let be she must dwell with pirates," I answered.

"There's Rule Four of our Articles," he sneered. "Ye will ha' heard it before. It should be assurance for any maid."

"You have heard my terms," I said. "Take them or leave them. There's eight hundred thousand pounds to be gained from treating us kindly. If you do not so, as sure as I am here we will die, the three of us, before we yield you the secret—and you should know the years 'twill require to dig over the Dead Man's Chest."

"We'll take you," he replied ill-naturedly. "And such a argufying swab I never listened to or will again, —— my eyes. Are ye fixed in your mind, Buckskin?"

"Yes."

"Drop your arms and bide where ye are, then. We're comin' in to look ye over."

Torches flickered around the circuit of the stockade, and as they drew nearer Peter and I tore down the barricade of treasure I had built across the doorway. Figures appeared in the wavy light, naked to the waist, scratched by the jungle growth; uncouth, grizzled faces lowered at us.

"Keep back," I warned them. "We'll let no man in until Captain Flint is here."

"Careful, ain't ye, Buckskin?" he mocked me from behind a clump of pirates. "Make way, shipmates. Ye'll all ha' a chance to see the treasure, soon or late, and we'll share in it equal and regular, accordin' to the Articles."

The group split to make way for him, and he strode up to the door. Bones was with him, and Silver, and the man they called Black Dog, who carried a torch, as did Bones. And behind them all limped an awful creature, whose grimy face was a mask of pain, whose bare back and flanks were crisscrossed with festering welts. In one hand he held a cat-o'-nine-tails, the pendent rope lashes with their jagged knots stained a dark claret hue.

Bones flourished his torch as they entered the low door, and the light shone into every corner of the big hut.

"Is that Murray?"

He pointed to the body that lay beneath the hacked remnants of the plum satin coat which served as shroud.

"Yes," I said, and Moira shrank betwixt Peter and me as they crowded forward, staring open-mouthed at the cold clay that represented the man they had so feared and hated.

"Gut me," swore Flint. "I never thought to see Andrew Murray lyin' stark."

Silver's eyes glinted from his slab of a face.

"He don't figure much now, do he, mates?" he said.

"Let's have a look at him," spoke up Bones abruptly. "Here, Black Dog, bring up your light, too."

The man with the sore back limped after them, drawing the tails of his cat through the fingers of one hand with a kind of lingering caress.

"Let me at mun," he muttered. "I'll flay mun, I will! I'll learn mun t' murder sailormen. Five o' us, and ——"

Bones brushed off the plum satin coat with one toe, and Murray's guant white face smiled up at them, faintly satirical, the snuff-box still clutched in one hand.

"—— me, 'tis so he looked ever!" gasped Flint.

" 'Taint right nor natural," said Bones. "He looks like he knowed we was here—and couldn't harm him none."

Silver said nothing, peering down at the dead man with a puzzled frown as if he were trying to read something that was hidden behind the impassive features.

"He'll look dif'rent when I lash mun," whined the man with the cat, pushing past Black Dog. "Wait till t' cat slices into t' back o' mun, cap'n. I'll cut t' grin offn t' ——'s face o' mun."

'Twas Silver caught the poor fellow's arm as it was raised to strike.

"No, no, Tom!" he cried. "Murray's dead."

"Dead?" answered the man dazedly. "But 'ee promised I should ha' t' beatin' o' mun!"

"Aye, Tom; but ye can't beat a dead man."

"Why? He beat me till I was like t' die. He beat three o' my mates till they died, an' Job Pytchens is a-dyin' out in the sand right now."

But Flint himself snatched the cat from the man's grasp with unaffected horror.

"Ye can't beat a dead man, Tom," insisted the *Walrus'* captain. " 'Tis bad luck. And look at the good luck we ha' had since we found Darby McGraw! I can tell ye, mates, I'm a-going to hang on to my luck."

Bones growled assent, and Silver added—

"Aye, aye, cap'n; and if ye'll be guided by me ye'll lose no time in puttin' Murray underground."

They all exchanged superstitious glances, and Bones said hoarsely—

"He *were* close to bein' more'n human, weren't he?"

"They do say as how ye can chain down a ha'nt by drivin' a stake through the body," suggested Black Dog—and he shook so that his torch scattered sparks.

"Ye couldn't pin Murray down that way if he was of a mind to ha'nt ye," answered Silver. "Not that I believe in ha'nts myself."

"It's bad luck to mutilate the dead," objected Flint. "No, no, we'll bury him quick and be done with it."

"But 'ee promised I was t' beat mun," sobbed Tom Morphew. "I let 'ee in, Long John, and 'ee promised!"

"How was I to know he'd be dead?" returned Silver. "Don't ye take on so, Tom. We'll give ye a double handful o' onzas for what ye done, and when your back's well ye'll ha' a rare spree wi' the yellow boys, eh?"

But Morphew refused to be comforted. He limped from the hut, trailing his whip behind him.

" 'Tisn't goold I want," he wept. " 'Tis to lay my lash to t' back o' mun. Aye! Till he do be bloody raw, same as Tom Pytchens and they other lads as is under sod. Oh, my pore back!"

There was an interval of silence after he was gone.

"It's bad luck to touch the dead," reaffirmed Flint. "No, no, the thing to do is to bury him quick. You take half a dozen men, Bill, and plant him anywhere—so's he's deep enough."

"And what about the treasure?" called one of the men by the door.

"Aye, aye," chimed in a second. "When do we shift it aboard and divvy up?"

Flint stroked his chin, considering.

"Why, there's no hurry about the treasure, mates," he answered finally. " 'Tis safe here. What we all need now is a dram o' rum and two watches below."

There was a general murmur of assent with this sentiment, and he crooked his finger at me.

"Come along, Buckskin. We'll put the three o' ye aboardship, out o' harm's way, seein' as ye're so precious o' your skins. Long John, I'll leave it to ye to guard the prisoners. Give the girl a stateroom for herself—less'n ye might wish to share it, Buckskin?" he added with a leer that fetched a ruddy tide to Moira's cheeks.

He guffawed.

"Dainty, ain't ye, my lass? Well, the *Walrus* is a pirate, not a private man-o'-war, and maybe ye'll learn a thing or two."

SILVER motioned us to precede him into the night, and as we passed out he gathered together a party of men who formed loosely around us.

"If so be as ye'll give me your word to come peaceable, Master Ormerod, I can make things easier for ye," he offered when we were clear of the hut.

"What do you say, Peter?" I asked the Dutchman.

"*Ja.*"

"That's enough for me," announced Silver cheerfully. "And very sensible of ye, too, gentlemen. Not quite so fast. I'm only a crippled sailorman, and I ha' labored hard this night. Aye, it were such a seesaw o' fortune as kep' my heart a-poppin' in my throat. I thought ye had me on the stockade; but there's none like Pew wi' the knife, and he can smell his man when he can't see him. Well, well, who'd ha' s'posed when we met in New York we'd come to aught like this, Master Ormerod?"

I lacked the heart to answer him, and we stumbled through the woods in silence to the shore of the anchorage. Here one of the *Walrus'* boats was launched, and we were rowed out to where she lay, her hull squatting like a rock in the quiet water. Men hailed us from her deck, a whip was sent down for Silver's convenience, and the rest of us climbed the side ladder, Moira as agile as any after her months at sea.

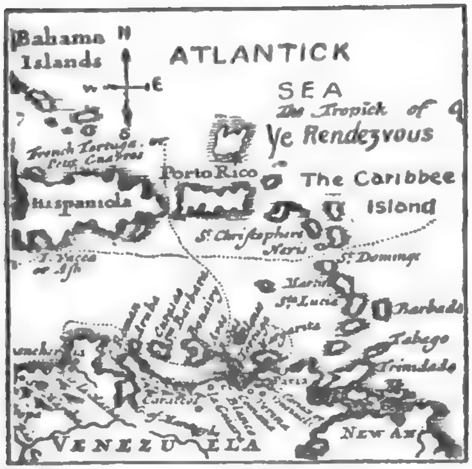
"Here we are, safe and snug on the old *Walrus*," remarked Silver, still aggressively cheery; "and them as is here can call theirselves fortunate, 'cause there's a plenty as ha' kept Murray company. Aye, blast me for a swab, but it ha' been a bloody night. Get for'ard, mates."

This to the men who had come off with us.

"I'll see to the pris'ners. Now then, gentlemen—*and* mistress—you come along wi' me, and I'll make ye all as comf'table as if ye was in a Bristol packet."

He prodded a muscular forefinger into my chest.

"You mind that, Master Ormerod. You mind that Long John was your friend. 'Cause why, says you? 'Cause there's never a man could see through the sand in the hour-glass, could he now? And we'll ha' queer times ahead o' us—aye, queer times. How queer, says you? Ah, how'm I to know? All I says, and I stands on my words, is there'll be queer times—and you mind Long John was kindly and stood your friend, hearty and free. D'ye see?"



He plainly desired an answer, although I was not very certain of what he was driving at with this rigmarole.

"I'm afraid I don't," I said shortly.

He cocked his head on one side.

"Ye don't? Humph, there's things best left unsaid, but I'll put this to ye. Here's the *Walrus*, and here's a treasure, and here's Flint, and here's maybe twelvescore lads as don't all think alike, and here's Bill Bones—and here's me. A goodish bit might happen, my master. And who's to say what will start it a-happenin'? Not me! Nor who might come out on top a'terwards."

And with a parting wink he stumped aft, crooking his finger in sign that we should follow him across the untidy deck.

"Glory!" sniffed Moira, her nose in air. "This will be more the like of a stable than a ship."

She did not exaggerate. The *Walrus* was dirtier than she had been the night Peter and I were committed to her as hostages. Her decks were foul with grease and all manner of filth; her paint was cracked and peeling; a cloud of flies buzzed around a tub of fish-guts which nobody would take the trouble to cast overside; from an open hatch poured a sour, acrid stench. A strange contrast with the *Royal James!*

Inside the companionway under the poop we tripped over the usual litter of broken bottles, pistol-flints and odds and ends of cast-off clothing. Silver balanced himself on his crutch against the wall, struck flint and steel to a slow-match and ignited the wick of a whale-oil lanthorn which depended from a hook. Holding this above his head, he surveyed the double line of stateroom doors, very similar to the plan of the cabin quarters of the *James*, except that where the *James* had six state-rooms, here were four.

"Room for all," he pronounced. "This here to port is Flint's, and Bones' berth's opposite. T'others are full o' junk, but ye can soon clear 'em out."

Inspection revealed that the junk was mostly Jamaica rum and other strong liquors, which we removed to the main cabin. But the crusted dirt of years was not so easily dispossessed. Silver, to do him justice, was tolerant of our initial efforts, and went so far as to procure us a bucket on a rope which we could lower over the side for water; but he wearied of such fruitless work after a time and hopped away to his hammock with admonitions to us to be satisfied "there ain't no nipper-bugs in them bunks."

We did the best we could, which was very little, and then persuaded Moira to risk lying in the cleaner of the two rooms—we had chosen it for her because it had a bolt on the inside of the door and offered her a degree of privacy—while Peter and I berthed across the companionway, Peter on the floor by reason of his bulk, and I in the one cramped bunk. And I marvel to say that we went promptly asleep and did not waken until the noon sun was flooding through the grimy panes of the cabin windows.

A rumble of snores assured us that Flint and Bones were in their berths, but the sound of a familiar brogue drew us aft to the main cabin.

"And what way will ye ha' cause for complaint that ha' seen men walk the plank and been to Madygascar and the East Indies and Afriky where the naygurs come from? On me soul, ye sicken me with your whining! Holy ——, man, do but look to me that am a pirate these many months, and all the fighting they will ha' throwed in me way was with other pirates—and them great, powerful rogues that give as good as we sent. Sure, I haven't been at the scuttling of any wan—"

"But ye had a cutlas to your hand and a musket on your shoulder," protested another familiar voice. "And ye walk the deck wi'out shoes to your feet, and ye ha' a fine bright kerchief to the head o' ye, and if ye seek to haul on a rope or hold to the wheel there's no man will say ye nay, Darby. But wi' me it's been lacky's work an' livery-shuits since the first day I went to sea. It's 'Ben, clear the table!' or 'Fill up the glasses, Ben Gunn!' or 'Fetch me the 'backy, Gunn!' I'm no more a pirate than the Irish maid——"

"Don't ye be naming her, or I'll lay the end o' a rope to ye! I won't ha' ye talkin' the way ye were betther nor ye are. Didn't the cap'n give ye to me for me sarvant? Sure, he did! '—— me,' says he when we took ye, 'Darby, you're a good cabin boy and main lucky. I'll give ye the feller to be doin' your work for ye.' "

"Well, there was one promised to take me out o' livery-shuits," answered Gunn doggedly, "and if he——"

He broke off as we entered from the companionway, writhing with the excess of embarrassment which visited him when in the presence of several persons. Darby McGraw was no less surprized and leaped up from the chair in which he had been lounging, bobbing his head to Moira with the vigor of a heathen kowtowing to an idol. All the boy wore was a pair of canvas trousers belted about his waist and a kerchief from which straggled his carroty locks. A cutlas slapped his thighs, and three pistols were stuck through his belt.

"Masther Bob!" he exclaimed. "And Masther Peter, too! And—and—Misthress O'Donnell—sure, there's a harp within' me does be strummin' pretty music this instant!"

He grinned; and for all his months aboard the *Walrus*, his grin was as sunny as in the counting-room in Pearl Street.

"Ye'll be forgivin' me, ma'am, that am Irish meself, and must think o' the lakes o' Antrim when I look to your eyes."

Moira clasped her hands.

"Antrim!" she cried. " 'Twas in Antrim I was born, and my mother before me."

"Ah, then, 'tis glad I will be I met ye this side o' the world," he answered, clapping his hand to his cutlas-hilt very hardily. "For if we'd come on each other in Antrim I'd be no more nor a gossoon of a bog-trotter and ye one o' the grand gentry-folk."

Moira's laugh had the note of fairy chimes I had not heard since her father fell on the *James'* deck.

" 'Tis you are the lad with the silver tongue," she said. "But if ye come from Antrim, Darby, it will be almost as if we were of the same family."

She suddenly sobered.

"And I, that might be elder cousin or maybe sister to you, must be asking why ye are a pirate? Were ye not honest-born?"

Darby's embarrassment was almost as painful as Ben Gunn's.

"Why, ye see— There was in me always the wish for the sea— I was no more nor a bound-boy— And Long John, he says ——"

"Darby," she interrupted sternly, "how long will it be since ye confessed?"

He poked at his bare toes with the tip of his cutlas-sheath.

"Why, maybe—oh, a month this way or maybe that, I'd say—well, troth, if ye put it to me——"

"A many months," she asserted.

"I'll not deny it," he admitted, shamefaced.

"And you from Antrim, Darby!"

" 'Tis no fault o' mine when I couldn't come at the priest."

"Maybe no, if you held your ways in places a priest would frequent; but who would be expecting a priest in a pirate-ship? And what would the priest say did ye go to him and confess what ye ha' done? Oh, Darby, ye will be a monstrous wicked boy!"

Darby was overwhelmed.

"On me soul, I never meant to be! Troth, there's none will ever be repenting better nor me—if I do but get the chance. But do ye see, misthress, it will be the like o' this: Whiles ye lives wi' pirates ye must be main wicked, and aftherwards, when ye break free o' them, there'll be lashin's o' time to make up for it."

He sought to cover his confusion by rounding upon Ben Gunn, who had stood trembling to one side throughout this dialog.

"What way will this be that ye act, ye

lacky?" he demanded with an excellent imitation of Flint's manner. "Will ye be too stupid or feared to see we are waitin' our bite and sup?"

"Stop! Stop!" I intervened as poor Gunn started to scramble from the cabin. "How comes it you are here? Do I understand you have been relegated to your former duties by Captain Flint?"

"I don't know what relegated means, Master Ormerod," replied Gunn forlornly; "but I'm doin' my former dooties, yessir. I figgered last night 'twas all up wi' Cap'n Murray, which same I hears is true, and so I says to myself, I says, 'Ben, you go and tell Cap'n Flint here's a man as is glad and willin' to j'in up and serve him handsome, a man as is as good a sailor, give him a chance, as any afloat.' "

He shuffled his feet a moment, regarding me sidewise.

"Ye see," he amended, "I figgered as how with Cap'n Murray gone 'twouldn't hardly be possible for you to give me the new ratin' we talked about once. And then bein' the circumstances it seemed all ways fair as I should make the best deal——"

"Yes, yes," I said; "but what did Cap'n Flint say?"

Ben Gunn scratched his head in some perplexity.

"He said summat as how I was too good a lacky to spoil. And then he called to Darby and told him a good cabin boy desarved his own sarvant and here I was. And here I be, sir! Unlucky I were born, steppin' into a livery-shuit as page-boy, and unlucky I ha' lived. And unlucky I'll die, I reckon, sir. But I won't die in no livery-shuit, no sir!"

With which he shuffled off.

"The ignorant natural!" snorted Darby disgustedly. "Him to be a pirate!"

CHAPTER XXI

FLINT'S WAY

BONES swaggered into the cabin whilst we were still eating, and his leathery face crinkled in what he intended for an amorous grimace as his eyes fell upon Moira.

"This is what I calls proper homelike," he declared. "You come and sit on Billy's knee, my pretty, and cut up this here goat for me."

I started to rise, but Darby was ahead of me.

"Do ye so much as put a finger on her, and I'll send a bullet into the black heart o' ye," he challenged in his shrill boy's voice.

"Oh, ye will? Ye red-headed ——"

"Me head's the ship's luck," boasted Darby. "The less ye say on that score, the betther for ye."

"We'll see to that!" snarled Bones. "You're the cabin boy, my lad, and no more; and I ——"

He tugged at his cutlas-hilt, and Darby, in no wise daunted, hauled forth a pistol as long as his arm. But before one could assail the other Flint shoved in from the companionway and caught Bones by the shoulder.

"What now, Bill?" he demanded. "Ain't we got enough to face wi'out you fightin' in the cabin?"

"And would ye ha' me take impidence and worse from this red-headed land-rat as Long John picked up in New York?" shouted Bones.

"I'd not," returned Flint. "Darby, you may be my good luck and a lad o' promise, but I'll lay the cat to your shoulders if you go for to make trouble."

" 'Twas him was afther makin' the throuble," answered Darby sturdily. "Wasn't he botherin' Mistress O'Donnell? Sure, I'm Irish, the same as her, and I'll kill the rogue that does be givin' her cause for to weep a tear— that I will. And I care not who he may be!"

"Easy, all," admonished Flint. "What's this, Bill?"

"Blow me for a dock-swab if I can see as how she'd oughter be set apart," blustered Bones. "I'm mate, I am, and if I ——"

Flint's bloodshot eyes focused upon him with something of the silent force that I had seen Murray employ against his wild crew.

"You know better nor that, Bill," he said quietly. "Here Long John's just been to tell me the crew ha' demanded a fo'csle council, and God knows what Allardyce and his gang will be up to. And you want to bust into the middle of Rule Four. Gut me! There's a many things I held against Andrew Murray, but one thing he did as was the wisest any gentleman adventurer ever done—and it's to his credit no less because Bart Roberts done it before him—and that was Rule Four."

"A woman's a prize, same as treasure," grumbled Bones.

"Oh, no, she ain't! A woman's trouble—she's no prize. You know what happens when there's women aboard a buccaneer. Jealousy, fightin', and as much blood spilled as in an action. We can't afford to lose no more men, Bill. Here we are wi' a bare ship's company left out o' five hundred men! I tell ye I'm for sendin' down the plank any man as draws a knife from this day."

"Much good it'll do ye," said Bones.

"We'll see to that. Anyhow, I'll ha' no fightin' over women."

He scowled himself.

"I'd throw the wench overboard if it weren't that she's my best chance to find the stuff Murray hid."

"If harm comes to her you'll get no such knowledge from any of us," I interposed.

"Oh, belay that!" he rasped. "You're lucky to be alive, and the one reason for it is that ye know what ye know."

He turned to Bones again.

"Now, mark me, Bill, lay off her. When we get this treasure cleaned up ye can take all the time ye fancy for wenches or aught else."

"Aye, when we do!"

"And that'll be sooner than ye think," retorted Flint.

"Wi' the crew all shoutin' for disbandment? Allardyce talkin' of goin' home tomorrow? I ha' seen ye handle some bad times, John Flint, but you're no Andrew Murray!"

The gibe annoyed Flint. His face turned blue, as it did when his temper was fanned or he was in liquor.

"Watch me," he snapped. "I'll learn 'em a few things yet. No Andrew Murray! Maybe not. But I ha' my own way, Bill. Aye, Flint's way! And it ain't so bad."

He suddenly remembered us.

"Keep your mouths shut, d'ye hear? No sneakin' up to John Silver or any one else. And as for you, my wench—" he frowned at Moira—"keep under cover, for your own sake as well as mine. This is a rough ship, a pirate ship, and——"

"Don't ye worry about Misthress O'Donnell," said Darby loyally. "I'll see to her."

"Oh, ye will!"

Flint laughed.

"You're beginnin' young, Darby. Gut me, what a lad! Well, you keep her out o' harm's way, and when we divide the treasure maybe there'll be an extry allowance for ye. How'd ye like to have her, eh?"

"She'll be better worth the havin' than all the treasure there is", flashed Darby. "And do you be mindin' what I'm afther tellin' ye, Cap'n Flint. If harm comes to her, or sorrow into the heart of her, 'twill be the end o' your luck—aye, lucky ye'll be do ye come off wi' a neck ye can breathe through."

Flint went pale.

"Now, now, Darby!" he wheedled. "Don't ye talk that reckless way. 'Taint' good for our luck. And I ha' been main kind to ye, and ——"

" 'Tis you would be the ruin of our luck," said Darby. "All I'm for tellin' ye is to be gentle in handlin' an eligant young maid as ye ought to be on your two knees before this moment for the throuble and sore dismay ye ha' wrought wi' her."

"She's safe enough, Darby," Flint answered. "I'd never harm her. We'll keep her until we ha' lifted what's buried on the Dead Man's Chest, and then she and her two buckos can take a small boat and fare how they please, and ——"

"And I'll be with 'em," added Darby.

"Oh, no, not you, Darby! Think o' all the red gold ye'll have aboard the *Walrus*. And there's your luck we'll still need."

"Me luck!" fumed Darby. "May the —— curse me luck! 'Tis more of a nuisance than a help."

"Ah, that's no way to talk."

Flint was nigh frantic.

"Lad, would ye lose all your red head has brought us? And look ye, too, if the maid's to be safe, 'tis I alone can keep her so, for wi'out me there'll be —— to pay, and none to stall the reckoning."

"And that before this glass is out," affirmed Bones with saturnine emphasis.

The mate knocked the neck off a flask of rum with his cutlas-hilt and poured the equivalent of a water-glass down his throat, gurgling it lustily that he might secure the full savor of the fiery liquor.

"I'll take the rest o' that!" exclaimed Flint eagerly. "Aaa-aah! There's naught like good rum to put heart in a man, Bill. Here, Darby, you finish it. That's the lad! And don't talk no more about losin' your luck. We're goin' to need that luck mighty bad these next few days. Aye, this very day, as Bill says. For here's Tom Allardyce and a batch o' chicken-hearted —— —— a-cryin' we should be satisfied wi' what we got, disband and save our necks. And I don't know what more bilge-slush."

"'Tain't Allardyce I'm 'feared of," said Bones wisely, "but Silver. He's got a head on his shoulders, Long John has, and all the men'll listen to him after the way he carried the stockade."

Flint nodded.

"True for you; but what you're amiss on is that John feels same as I do about disbandin'. After the treasure's all lifted, look out for squalls. But right now, Bill, Silver's as strong for pullin' together as you and me."

"Maybe," said Bones with more of doubt than conviction.

"Maybe? Gut me for a lubber if I'm not right."

Flint rose from the seat he had assumed.

"You come along on deck, and I'll show ye. You, too, Darby. No, no, lad—" when Darby would have hung back—"I want ye by me. I tell ye that red head o' yours is the best beacon I ever steered by."

At the exit to the companionway he halted and spoke to us over his shoulder:

"You mind what I said about the girl. Keep her under cover."

"Must we all remain below decks?" I demanded with some heat.

"That's as ye may happen to feel," he replied carelessly. "So long as ye don't try to suck up to any o' my men and make trouble you can go and come around the ship; but let me find ye up to mischief, and treasure or no treasure, I'll keelhaul ye."

His green eyes twinkled evilly.

"Maybe Murray told ye what that might mean."

He gave Darby a push before him.

"Run out and call the men aft," he commanded. "That's the boy! Bill, —— ye for a low-hearted —— ——, plaster a grin on that mug o' yours and pipe up a song. We mustn't let them swabs for'ard figure us to be worried none, eh?"

And his voice boomed hollow betwixt the confined walls of the companionway:

"Oh, a fine, tall ship was the *Elephant*
As ever sailed the seas;
She came down-Channel apast Ushant
Bound for the East Indies.

"And Dicky Lamb, he says to the crew—
He was the bosun's mate—
'Pickle my guts! Will ye do what I do?
Be game, says I; tempt fate!'"

Bones joined valiantly in the sweep of the tune:

"We are forty-five before the mast,
And ten green clerks berthed aft,
With the cap'n, the cook, the mates and last,
Simmy, the boy, who's daft.

"That's fifteen hands against forty-five.
——! What an easy lay!
We'll take 'em at night, and dead or alive,
Pitch 'em in Biscay Bay.

"Oh, that was a night the wind howled free,
The sails froze to the mast,
And Dicky Lamb and the Portugee,
They bound the cap'n fast."

They were out on deck now, and Flint stayed the song long enough to roar:

"Lay aft, ye swabs! Ye asked for a fo'csle council, and ye shall have it. —— me, Bill, can't ye sing louder?"

"Louder!" I muttered to Moira and Peter. "Certes, ye might hear them on the Spyglass."

"Ssh!" reproved Moira. "I will be wanting to hear the rest of it. There, Darby is singing now—and others."

A score of voices took up the savage lilt:

"Sandy Grant bashed the mate in the head
And dropped him overside.
The second mate they stabbed abed,
And so the ten clerks died.

"The cook they choked on his own salt pork;
But Simmy they couldn't find,
For Simmy was daft, and their evil talk
Had roiled his feeble mind.

"He groped his way to the darkest hold,
With ax and bit and saw,
And laughed with glee as the waters rolled
In through the hole he tore.

"Oh, that was the end of the *Elephant*—
She's under the Biscay seas,
And she'll never more slant past Ushant,
Bound for the East Indies."

By the time they came to the last verse the whole crew must have been singing. The roar of voices made the dishes quiver on the table before us.

"A proper song, 'The *Elephant*,'" commented Flint's voice. "Barrin' 'Fifteen Men' 'tis the best I know. I ain't no preacher, but I can't help bearin' in mind that every crew has some feller like Simmy, some feller as always wants to scuttle the prize for his own satisfaction, and never mind what his mates thinks."

There was no answer to this, only the slapping of bare feet on the deck and the rustle of men crowded close together.

"Well, speak up, fo'csle," he went on with a note of satire. "What d'ye seek? I've heard tell as how there was talk of givin' me the Black Spot—whatever that may be—and sailin' home by your lones and dead reckonin'. What's the argyment, I say?"

THE companionway acted like a voice-tube to carry the deck-noises to our ears; but hearing was not the same as seeing, so Peter and I persuaded Moira to slip into her stateroom and ourselves advanced to a position immediately inside the doorway issuing upon the main-deck, where the council was being held.

The scene was almost identical with that which I had witnessed a few night's previously when I spied upon Flint's preparations to surprize Murray. Flint sat, as he had then, upon an upturned barrel, with Bones, Silver, Pew and two or three more. The remainder of the crew were squatted on the deck, a semicircular pattern of coppery faces and tattooed chests. The weather had turned warm after the storm, and practically all of them wore Darby's costume, a pair of trousers or breeches, usually slashed off above the knees.

Foremost in the ring of seamen was a tall, lanky fellow with rather long, yellow hair and a belligerent expression. 'Twas he who sustained the burden of the debate with Flint, supported to some extent by a group of a score or so, who sat behind him.

"Aye, aye, Tom Allardyce," Flint was saying as we reached our aerie. "You was the man all against attackin' Murray."

"Wasn't I right?" retorted Allardyce. "Didn't all happen as I said it would? Butchered, we was."

"Everything don't go right from the beginnin'," answered Flint. "But just look where we be now, mates."

"It ain't your doin'," asserted Allardyce. "'Twas only blind luck as the storm wrecked Murray and we rode it out."

"Ah!" said Flint agreeably. "Luck is right. The very words I'd use myself, Allardyce. For see ye, 'tis luck counts for the most, and I ha' been main lucky o' late. No man can deny that. Whatever I put my hand to turns out well."

This received a murmur of endorsement, and the yellow-haired man cried out—

"Luck is well enough, but all luck comes to an end, and I am saying that ye ha' stretched yours overthin, cap'n."

"That's moderate," admitted Flint. "I'd say myself as I'm for doublin' my luck. Ye see, mates—" he appealed to the several hundred men who thronged the deck—"my luck has won us eight hundred thousand pounds, and I'm for using it to win eight hundred thousand pounds more. And that's askin' less o' luck than ye might think, seein' the heaviest part is accomplished. We ha' three prisoners as know the secret o' Murray's cache, and all we need do is sail to the Dead Man's Chest, land a party and ferry the stuff aboard."

"Aye, and s'pose a frigate jumps us?" called one of the men sitting with Allardyce.

"Depends on the frigate, man," answered Flint equably. "A Spanisher I'd fight. A King's ship I'd run from. A Frenchy—I don't know."

"The ship's foul. We couldn't run," said Allardyce. "No, mates, I say we ha' eight hundred thousand pounds, and we'd better be satisfied wi' that. 'Tis a couple o' thousand pounds apiece."

"Aye, aye," came from a number of men. "Disband while the luck's wi' us,"

"Disband wi' eight hundred thousand pounds more as good as in our pockets!" exclaimed Flint. "I never heard crazier talk."

"Better live wi' eight hundred thousand pounds than lose a third o' us to win twice that," insisted Allardyce doggedly.

"Not while I ha' aught to say about it!" roared Flint. "Gut me if I'll lose riches we all ha' worked and fought for just to please a handful o' swabs as haven't got the courage to risk a bit more."

There were expressions of opinion both ways upon this; the company was fairly well divided. And Allardyce proceeded to press his advantage.

"If ye talk about losin' riches, cap'n, 'tis you are willing to risk losing the eight hundred thousand pounds we have in hand. Ye'd go for the other treasure, and most like lose those what we already have."

Flint squinted reflectively at the yellow-haired man.

"Now that might be a good argyment,

Allardyce, if 'twas true," he remarked. "But it ain't. The truth is, I am all for makin' the treasure we have safe before we go cruisin' to the Dead Man's Chest. Treasure is a poison on ship-board if ye ain't got a sure use for it. That's why I had ye leave ashore the lot Murray moved to the blockhouse. It's out o' the ship."

Allardyce lost his temper.

"Aye, ye want it where ye can get your hand on it, and give us the slip!"

"How'd I do that, Allardyce?" inquired Flint softly.

"If I knowed how you were plannin' to do it I'd stop ye."

"Ah, stop me, would ye?"

"I would! There's other men ha' marooned or murdered the half o' a ship's company that there might be fewer to share in the prize."

"That's kindly of ye," said Flint. "I take that real kindly! There's some, Allardyce, as might draw pistol for that. No, no, put up your weapon! I'm a-goin' to prove to ye, whether ye like it or not, that I mean well by ye. I'll tell ye what I'll do.

"First off, mates—" he addressed the whole crew—"do ye or don't ye want to win eight hundred thousand pounds more wi'out havin' to fight for it?"

A fair majority were in favor of this.

"Second, mates, are ye willin' as the treasure we have shall be buried here on the Rendezvous until we ha' fetched back the part that's on the Dead Man's Chest?"

"Who's to bury it?" put in Allardyce sullenly. "'Tis easy for a few men to bury treasure so's none save theirselves can find it—and if they disappear suddenlike, what'll their shipmates do?"

"There's sense in that," agreed Flint. "Let's say as you and me bury it, Allardyce."

The yellow-haired man shook his head.

"There'd be one o' us come back—and 'twouldn't be me."

"Got a great idea o' me, ain't ye?" mocked Flint. "But s'posin' ye took along some friends? Would ye feel safe then?"

"How many?"

Flint turned to Silver, whose hard eyes had been studying the faces of both parties to the debate.

"How many would ye say, Long John?"

Silver's big face split in a smile of derisive quality.

"Seein' as you're one o' the party, cap'n, maybe we might say five—six includin' himself."

"Ye think he'd be safe from me wi' five friends along?" asked Flint earnestly.

"Six is a good number for buryin' treasure," replied Silver, grinning broader than ever. "And with you 'twould be seven—and seven's lucky."

Flint regarded him admiringly.

"Wouldn't ye know 'twould take Long John to think o' that? Seven is lucky, says he! Ah, yes, and who for? Well, Allardyce, what d'ye say? Will ye feel safe wi' six friends?"

Several men laughed.

"Yes," answered the yellow-haired man.

"Then that's settled," said Flint. "Pick 'em now. We'll start settin' the treasure ashore at once. You and your friends and me, we'll go off soon as that's finished. Bill Bones will take command o' the *Walrus*. Bill, ye'd better take her out east o' the island and stand off and on, weather permitting. If ye lie up here wi' naught to do, there'll be trouble, and men will be comin' ashore, and so we'll get no work done."

"How long will ye be?" asked Bones, smiling in a knowing way.

Flint hailed Allardyce, who was already deep in conversation with his group of supporters.

"How long d'ye figure it should take to stow away the two lots of treasure, Allardyce? We'll put the gold and coined silver in one cache and the bar silver in another."

"How do I know?" snarled Allardyce.

"'How does he know?' says he," Flint echoed gravely. "Tell ye what, Bill, you just stand off and on like I said, and when we're ready to come aboard we'll row out o' the anchorage. That's simple enough, ain't it? No chance for misunderstandin' or aught goin' wrong."

Peter and I ducked into our stateroom as the two came aft. They went into Bones' room, which was next to Moira's, and for some time we could hear them talking in low tones. When they came out Flint was saying:

"Mind, Bill, an easy rein, but give 'em no slack. And leave the wench alone. 'Twould only make endless trouble wi' the crew."

Bones replied with a blistering string of curses.

"And ye were a fool," he wound up, "to let Long John make odd o' six to one. Why, even Murray ——"

"Stow that!"

I could feel an edge of temper to Flint's voice.

"I'm sick o' hearing you prate Murray this and Murray that. I'll show this crew that Flint's way is as sure as Murray's."

"It's plum duff to Silver if aught happens to ye," remonstrated the mate.

"Don't ye worry, Bill. There'll be no man in this crew willing to lift a finger after I come aboard again. Where's my Flemish pistolets?"

When they were finally gone I looked an unspoken question at Peter.

"*Ja,*" he said.

"But six to one! Why?"

"He wants der treasure where only he can reach it. *Ja,* dot's it."

ON THE morning of the sixth day I was awakened by a considerable clamor on the deck, and Darby McGraw danced into my stateroom, so excited that his brogue was nigh incomprehensible.

"Haste ye! Haste ye, Masther Bob!" he cried. "'Tis Flint comin' off, and him by his lone."

I roused Peter, and we threw on our clothes and ran out upon the maindeck, which was crammed with pirates, staring in rapt suspense across the sta'b'd bulwarks. The sun was just rising, and the island shelved upward, darkly portentous, from the creamy lather of the surf. The *Walrus* was standing south, with the White Rock on her sta'b'd quarter and the entrance to Captain Kidd's anchorage ahead. Outside the entrance, and pulling to meet us, was the gig we had left behind for the convenience of Flint and his companions. A single figure with a light-blue scarf wrapped around his head, rowed at the oars.

"But how be certain 'tis Flint!" I exclaimed. "His back is toward us, and at this distance ——"

"Beggin' your pardon, Master Ormerod," said Silver at my elbow, "we ha' made him out wi' glasses. Bill—" he waved his free hand toward the poop, where Bones strode up and down by the helmsman—"is sure o' him."

The one-legged man sniggered and lowered his voice.

"Ye ain't surprized, are ye?" he asked.

"Six to one!" was all I could think to say.

"*Ja,*" agreed Peter, chuckling.

Silver sniggered again.

"Aye, six to one. A strong, desperate feller is Flint. Now what d'ye reckon he'll do wi' the map?"

"What map?"

"When ye bury treasure ye draws a map," Silver explained oracularly. "If so be as one man knows where 'twas buried and he has the map that treasure is safe till doomsday—'nless some one else gets the map."

"Well, he won't give me the map," I returned shortly.

"No-oo-o, it ain't likely. But if he ever stows it where ye can lay your hands on it or ye see him give it to anybody else you just remember as Long John stands your friend, gentlemen. Friend is the word, remember. And the old saw says as a friend in need is a friend indeed."

His black eyes glinted icily as they rested in turn upon Peter's face and mine. Then he stumped aft, shouting:

"Rig them boatfalls, mates. Stand by to hoist the cap'n's gig aboard."

Presently we rounded into the wind and came to, and Flint pulled under our lee, rowing slowly, with long, leisurely strokes like a man who is very weary but intent upon finishing a difficult undertaking. Now that he was so close we could see that the scarf around his head was crusted with blood. His coat and shirt were torn to shreds, and his shoes and stockings gummed with mud.

A man heaved him a couple of lines, and he knotted them carefully to bow and stern before he began to climb the cleats of the side ladder, moving stiffly but with unerring precision. As his face lifted above the bulwarks the men nearest to him gasped and trod back upon the toes of those behind them. Such a face I have never seen. 'Twas not alone the terrible blue color and the congested veins that bulged redly under the skin, but a suggestion of experiences beyond the pale of ordinary human understanding. His eyes glared savagely. His mouth was fixed in a grimace of hatred. In his tanned cheeks were riven lines of fear, of anger, of revenge, of cupidity, of insensate ambition—aye, and of remorse.

He dropped to the deck and peered watchfully around him.

"Well, here I be," he croaked. "Ho,

you Darby, fetch me a bottle o' rum. Yarely, lad!"

Darby skipped away on his errand, white-cheeked and shaking.

Nobody spoke, and Flint laughed—oh, dreadfully!

"Ye ain't glad to welcome your skipper back, eh? How'd ye make out, Bill?"

Bones had shouldered a path through the clustering ranks, but even he was speechless before Flint's ghastly figure.

"We—we—we're all right," he stuttered finally.

Silver, only, seemed unimpressed.

"Ye were seven as went ashore, cap'n," he said apologetically, "and one to return aboard."

Flint laughed that dreadful laugh a second time.

"Aye, there's six stayed ashore, Silver; six tall fellows. Six, says you, and seven's lucky. Aye, lucky! Main lucky! And Allardyce says he's safe wi' six. Ho, ho, ho!"

"Where—where—are they?" questioned Bones.

"Ashore, I told ye, Bill. All safe ashore."

"Dead?" pressed Bones.

"Aye, dead as Harry Morgan—or Avery."

Darby dived through the jam with an open bottle of rum, and Flint stretched out both arms and tossed men right and left to make way for the lad.

"Rum!" he exclaimed. "That's what I need. Rum—and plenty of it!"

He bent back his head, put the bottle to his lips and drank—and drank. You could hear the gurgle of it as it trickled down his gullet.

"Aaaa-aah!" he breathed. "That was rare stuff. Get me another, Darby."

He tossed the bottle overboard, and started to sing a stave of that savage sea-song which was the chief delight of the crew:

"Tom Avery died of a cutlas slash—
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle o' rum!
Mounseer Tessin felt the galleys' lash—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle o' rum!

"But the treasure," spoke up Silver. "What'd ye do wi' it, cap'n?"

Flint eyed him for as long as 'twould take to count twenty. And I am bound to say Silver met his eye unflinchingly.

"Why, 'tis safe, John," answered Flint in the horribly soft tones he had employed with Allardyce. "All tucked where it'll stay safe."

"Aye, but where? persisted Silver.

Flint's blue, mottled visage became convulsed with a passion words can not describe.

"Where?" he mouthed. "Aye, where? Ask on, man! Or seek it, if ye wish. Aye, go ashore. Lay off those ropes," he shouted to the men at the falls to which his gig was hitched. "There's a boat," he went on. "There's tools on the island. Ye can have food and rum. Go ashore if ye like, and stay—any o' ye! Search for the treasure till —— opens wide for ye. But as for the ship, she'll beat up for more, by thunder!"

He waited a moment, but no man accepted his challenge. Silver, indeed, stumped deliberately out of the crowd, with a far-away look in his eyes that were as bright and hard as a pair of polished buttons.

"That's well," said Flint. "The course is so'west by south, Bill. We're for the Dead Man's Chest. All sail, and a lookout in every top!"

CHAPTER XXII

"FETCH AFT THE RUM, DARBY McGRAW!"

MURRAY had predicted that the looting of the *Santissima Trinidad* would send the frigates to sea from Santo Domingo, St. Pierre, the Havana and Kingston, and the adventures of the *Walrus* furnished ample confirmation of his words. Six days' sail to the southward we raised the tops'ls of a lofty stranger whom the lookouts identified as a King's ship.

Flint, summoned from his perpetual debauch in the main cabin, agreed with them and ordered the helm put over. The *Walrus* headed west, and the stranger followed her. She clung to us through the day and night, and in the morning our glasses revealed the ominous belt of gunports of a sixty-gun razee. But like all English second-rates, she was clumsy in the water; and Flint was a good seaman, if nothing else. He contrived to keep beyond cannonshot and during the second night shifted his course cleverly and gave our pursuer the slip.

Yet he dared not turn back immediately, and we held on northeast into the track of the Spanish *flotas*, passing four ships westbound in the three days we continued upon this course. On the fourth day Flint deemed himself safe from the razee, the *Walrus* went about and he resumed his solitary rum-swigging in the cabin, drinking bottle after bottle the day long, cursing and singing and shouting his bloody tales and chanteys to an invisible audience that sat or fought with him.

For us three prisoners the *Walrus* was a floating bedlam. Moira might not stir from her stateroom unless it be at night when Flint occasionally slept and the most of the crew were carousing in the fo'csle; but she never complained of the confinement that washed the color from her cheeks, and retained her buoyant spirits despite the hideous danger which shadowed her every hour.

Without Darby she would have been in even worse case. 'Twas he spied out the moments she could venture abroad and thrust himself dauntlessly betwixt her and any threats. He carried her such food as she would eat and often did the same for us, for Flint was become subject to seizures of ungovernable ferocity, in the grip of which he distrusted all aboard the ship saving Bill Bones and Darby, and was in terror of unseen presences that lurked about the cabin's corners and mowed at him from the stern windows.

In these seizures he would take his pistols and shoot in every direction, regardless of who might be present, or with his hanger he would hack at the walls and pursue imaginary enemies along the companion-way. But for Darby he would have slain Ben Gunn, and he did actually cut down one unfortunate fellow who goggled at him as he stamped out upon the deck, foaming and mouthing defiance of the ghosts that tormented him.

Darby alone could handle him. Bones he trusted, but would brook no interference from; Darby, however, could talk to him freely and sometimes curb his violence, providing rum was forthcoming whenever he demanded it.

In the latitude of the Windward Passage a Spanish line-ship and two frigates blundered upon us unexpectedly out of a bank of mist. There was naught to do but run, and again Flint rallied to the emergency. That day we held our own; but in the night a moderate gale blew up, and the seventy-four was able to carry canvas that would have ripped the masts from the *Walrus*.

At dawn she opened with her chase-guns, and for five glasses Flint must jockey his ship to dodge the eighteen-pounder shot. Then the wind moderated, and as we hoisted sail after sail we commenced to draw away from the big Spaniard. She was a lubberly craft, and her captain was no man to develop her possibilities—as her gunners were unable to get upon a bouncing target in those slashing head seas. The frigates even yet, I think, might have overhauled us, but they were afraid to close and engage by themselves.

In the night Flint attempted to escape his pursuers as he had the King's ship by heading west toward the empty gulf of the Atlantic. But the Spaniards were prepared for this maneuver. They had spread out to cover a wide area of sea, with the result that we passed almost under the bows of one of the frigates, and the flashes of her guns warned her consorts where we were.

Undismayed, Flint varied the trick the next night, lying to in that dark hour which comes before moonrise, and they passed us without suspecting the ruse. By morning we were leagues away on our back-track, and Flint boasted of his luck until he became maudlin, sprawling upon the cabin-table in a mess of broken meats and glasses that must have sickened any sensible man.

He had a sorry awakening from his fool's dream two days later when a stately French forty-four showed herself at our heels. Ah, she was a greyhound! Every foot of her hull was molded for speed, and her rakish spars were clothed with a sail area that drove her a good three leagues to the glass. Bones, with Darby to aid him, pulled Flint away from the cabin-table and threw buckets of sea-water over him to unlock the fetters the rum had fastened upon his brain. And he staggered on deck, cursing like a fiend, to squint his bloodshot eyes over the stern rail. In a moment he was cold sober.

"Gut me, 'tis a Frenchy! We're his meat, mates. But we'll sell for our own price, eh? Pipe all hands to quarters, Bill. Cast loose and provide."

There was muttering amongst the crew. This was what Allardyce had foretold, and the survivors of his group of protestants were not slow to exploit the opportunity. But the majority of the men went to the guns as doggedly determined as Flint.

"Fight, ye dogs!" he bade them from the poop, swaying his mottled blue jowl from side to side. " 'Tis a noose or the galleys for ye the one way, and Davy Jones' locker the other. Betwixt the two ye may win free if ye fight. But wi'out fighting ye are ruined men."

The Frenchman disdained to use his chase-guns, so confident was he of bringing us to action at broadside range; but all the forenoon the breeze dwindled, and at midday both ships were caught in a dead calm. The frigate put out her boats, and so did we, and at once the advantage shifted in our favor. For 'twas one thing to tow a great forty-four, loaded with vast weight of metal, men and stores, and entirely a different task to tow the *Walrus*, of two-thirds the bulk and practically unladen below the gundeck. Moreover, the French sailors were in no wise so hardy or so desperate as the pirates, who knew that their chances of life were in proportion to the distance they extended betwixt the two vessels.

Flint swaggered around the fo'csle, swearing and urging on the men in the boats like the spectator of a horse-race who has staked more than he can afford upon the issue.

"We'll make it, —— me," he would say. "My luck's with us, I tell ye all. Here, Darby, jump on to the bulwarks and let 'em see your red head. Mark him, men! There's luck for ye. There don't live the man can stop me whilst the lad's with us."

And he would brandish his hanger at the towering sails of the frigate, lying slack against the yards, just out of cannonshot, and burst into the wildest imprecations and challenges.

"No Frenchman'll pull down John Flint! Aye, —— —— me for a —— —— —— if he will! I tell ye I ha' luck. Look to what I ha' done. There were three after us but two days since, and we lost 'em as we'll lose yon fellow."

His promises were justified amazingly. In the course of the afternoon we gained a hard-won league; and that night under cloak of darkness we stole silently north before a freshening wind, which by morning was a tempest. The French frigate disappeared, making the best of the heavy weather, and the *Walrus* was blown north and west for five days, past the latitude of Spyglass Island, past the scattered rocks and cays of the Bahamas, past the Floridas. Impossible now to watch for the tall spars of fighting-ships—as impossible as it would have been to fight them or for them to fight us, with the gray waves toppling mainyard high and the gunports buried half the time.

Flint had only dead reckoning to go by, for low-hung clouds and black banks of rain obscured sun and stars. Literally we did not know where we were, and our lookouts were peering through the scud for a landfall in the Bermoothas the morning the storm flailed itself to pieces.

It was this morning that the fever first appeared in our midst. I can still see the look, half-doubt, half-misgiving, in Silver's face as he heaved himself aft by one of the life-lines which grilled the maindeck and hailed Flint on the poop.

"There's ten lads groanin' in their hammocks, cap'n."

"Take your crutch to 'em," snapped Flint.

"Them lads is sick," answered Silver. "Belly-aches and headaches a-twistin' 'em in knots."

"They're soldierin' so as not to have to go aloft," returned Flint. "But if you're afraid of 'em, I'm not."

The first of the sick men he prodded with his hanger already was dead, and he hastened back to the cabin and fortified himself anew with rum. I heard him mumbling to Bones as he entered the companionway:

"It's main queer, Bill. I don't like it. Maybe my luck ain't good against sickness."

"Maybe," answered Bones. "What ha' ye done wi' the map?"

Flint's teeth gritted together.

"If I thought ye——"

"Belay there, John. I'm only thinkin' as if ye was sick some o' them swabs for'ard might try and come by it."

"Don't ye worry about that," advised Flint grimly. "It's safe—and it will stay safe."

A second man died the next day, and there were eighteen sick instead of ten. A panic possessed the crew, and Silver mustered a fo'csle council of frightened pirates, who whispered and nudged each other as they gazed awestruck at Flint's congested visage atop of the barrel which was his official throne. Thorough scoundrels themselves, they accorded him the sincere respect which was the due of one who utterly surpassed them in wickedness. He was "a rare 'un," "a main desperate rogue"; "lead and steel was same as bread and meat to him."

"What'll ye have?" he growled.

"Well, 'tis this way, cap'n," Silver

broached diplomatically. "The crew feels as the fever comes from the ship bein' foul and so long at sea——"

"We ain't been long at sea."

"Maybe not so long from the Rendeyvoo, but we ain't careened or cleaned ship this year."

"Whose fault is that?"

"It ain't nobody's fault. But it do seem as if we'd oughter run into some likely port where we could get sweet water and greens and check the fever before it runs through the crew."

"There's a many ports we could make," commented Flint sarcastically.

"We could allus head up for the island," interposed a man.

"So's ye could go for to dig up the treasure we just stowed away," snorted Flint. "Not if I know it!"

"There ain't been talk o' the island," said Silver hastily. "But what would ye say to the Bermoothas?"

"Too many reefs to pile ourselves on—and Hamilton is a port o' call for the King's ships."

"Them's almost the very words I said myself!" exclaimed Silver. "And what would ye say to Savannah, cap'n, which same is a quiet spot and has no garrison, seein' as Georgy is the newest o' all the colonies in Ameriky?"

Flint reached down to the deck beside him and lifted a bottle of rum to his mouth, going through the usual performance of draining it at one colossal gulp to the considerable admiration of the crew.

"Aaa-aah!" he muttered, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. "Savannah, eh? That might do. But mind ye, men, I'll ha' no talk o' disbandment, there or elsewhere. We'll stop by to clean up the fever and water, and when that's done we'll square off south and collect what's comin' to us on the Dead Man's Chest. I'm a man o' my word!"

Silver made quick assent.

"Fairly put. And the while we're lyin' off Savannah the frigates will be a-wearin' themselves out on false scents. It works both ways, cap'n."

"It'll work my way," rapped Flint.

He slid off the barrel, balanced dizzily for a moment and walked into the companionway under the poop.

"Darby McGraw!" he called harshly. "Ho, Darby, fetch aft the rum."

THAT night he had another of his fits, declaring that Andrew Murray was come aboard to slay him. He chased Bones from the cabin, hanger in hand, and was for setting upon the watch on deck when Darby restrained him with a bottle of rum, asserting it to contain Murray's heart's blood. Flint tossed it off with howls of infernal glee and retired to snore on the cabin floor, twitching and foaming at the mouth in his slumber like one possessed. The next day as we rolled in the oily swell under a torrid sun with the pitch pricking up in bubbles from the seams, the fever laid its hot hand upon him.

"Don't ye look at me that way, Gonzalez," he would scream. "Here, Bill, what kind o' shipmate are you to be lettin' old Ross in here wi' his bloody throat?"

And then he would turn pious.

"Ah now, mother, ye'd not ha' me bide home all my days like a baby, would ye? Look at these gold jos. Ain't they pretty? I'll wager ye ain't got a friend as has a son can fetch her stuff the like o' that! No, no; don't ye ask no questions. Oh, dear Christ, what a pain I got! God, God, don't ye let me go this way. I'll build a chapel home to Tewkesbury when I find Murray's cache. A million and a half pounds, God; aye, that and more—and just you 'n' me to share it, wi' some for Bill Bones and Darby, as is a good lad and lucky."

He babbled childishly of his luck.

"Ye wouldn't break my luck, God! Oh, Ye wouldn't! There never was none like John Flint to rove the seas, John Flint as outwitted old Murray and was the end of him."

The droning voice would ramble on day and night, with intervals of exhausted sleep, punctuated by awful, explosive screams:

"Ho, Darby! Darby McGraw! Fetch aft the rum, Darby!"

And again:

"I'm a-burnin' in my guts, Darby. Ye wouldn't leave me to burn. Fetch me a noggin o' rum!"

Other times he would sing, and always the one song that had been my introduction to his company:

"Bellamy's hangin' all dried and brown—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle o' rum!
A-rattlin' his chains by Kingston town—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle o' rum!"

But words can not describe the horrors of the week which succeeded. For five days men died at the rate of three a day. Then the disease seemed to diminish in virulence, and although we had as many as seventy sick at once, practically all survived. As a rule, men who were stricken either perished within twenty-four hours or else made a slow recovery. Flint was one of the few exceptions, and I can only suppose that in his case the illness resolved itself into a battle betwixt a naturally sinewy frame and the weaknesses developed by the strong liquors with which it had been saturated.

That we three and Darby were untouched I attribute as much as anything to the measures which Peter took. He brewed a drastic purgative of rum, molasses and gunpowder, and he was insistent that Darby should procure a large earthern crock to contain boiled water which we kept in Moira's stateroom. Bones, Silver, Pew and those others of the crew who escaped the infection did so simply because of their physical vigor or perhaps because they were so accustomed to living in filth that the exaggerated conditions aboard the *Walrus* might not harm them.

A week from the day we steered westward we sighted the mouth of a broad river, crossed a bar at high tide and bore upstream between low, sandy shores overgrown with pine forests. On the verge of evening we rounded a point of land and dropped our anchor opposite a little, log-built town perched on a sandy bluff.

A huddle of merchant shipping eyed askance the splintered sides and serried ports of the *Walrus*, and there was a general tendency to slacken anchor-cables and allow us ample room. Ashore men scurried to and fro; several small cannon were run out upon the platform of the stockade, and the British flag was displayed.

Peter and I had seized the opportunity of the semidarkness to escort Moira to the rail for a view of our new surroundings, and we were staring hungrily at this outpost of civilization when the *thud-thud* of Silver's crutch sounded on the deck behind us.

"Ye might think from them goin's-on ashore as there was a mighty treasure in Savannah," he observed; "but bless ye, there ain't enough worth the takin' in that town to pay for the gunpowder to blow down the stockade."

I assented, and Flint's voice came faintly through the twilight:

"Fifteen men on the Dead Man's Chest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a——"

"Ho, Darby! Darby McGraw! Fetch aft the rum, Darby McGraw!"

"He's main bad, Flint is."

Silver thrust a thumb over his shoulder.

"Won't hardly last till mornin', Bill says."

"Oh, poor soul!" exclaimed Moira. "And him with so much wickedness to answer for! I am thinking he will have great need of prayers, so if you will be after taking me below, Bob——"

"Bide a moment, mistress," interrupted Silver. "Ha' ye seen aught o' the map, Master Ormerod?"

"No," I answered briefly. "And I'll not be involved in your quarrels aboard this hell-ship."

"Easy, easy," he admonished me. "Rough words won't further ye, my gentleman. Here's me as will be glad to stand your friend, and you know best whether you need a friend. Figger it out for yourselves. Flint's as good as dead. Who comes a'ter him—me or Bill Bones? Which o' us would ye plump for? Bill, he's a desp'rate villain—and has his fish-eyes on the maid here.

"Long John, he wants treasure and a clean path home. I'm none o' your rum-swiggers and tavern-brawlers, gentlemen. I ha' had eddication, and I aims to get more. Give me a million and a half pounds to divvy, and I'll sack the old *Walrus* and ride to Parlyment in my coach, I will."

"What has that to do with us?" I demanded.

He winked.

"What has it to do with you, says you? Ah, what! Why, just this. I'm your friend. You stand by me and I'll stand by you. There'll be a 'lection of a cap'n, and if I knows this crew, him as has the treasure-map will come out on top. You get me the map, and I'll put you ashore."

Flint called out again suddenly in a frenzy of fear:

"Bill! Where's Bill Bones? Stand afore me, Bill. There's them here I can't face."

The guttural mutter of Bones' voice answered the plea. Silver cocked his head on one side, hand cupped to ear, listening eagerly. But the words were impossible to distinguish.

"No, no, not yet, Bill," wailed Flint. "I ain't a-goin' to die. Where's Darby? Here, lad, you come and sit by me. You're my luck, Darby. I can't die with you by me."

Bones spoke again, and with an oath Silver cuddled his crutch in his armpit and hopped over the deck to the companionway.

"We better go," said Peter. "*Ja*, we take der little gal to her room, Bob. I don't like this."

Silver reached the door of Flint's stateroom as we stepped inside the companionway. We could see him distinctly in the light of the fading sunset glow which came through the stern-windows. Ben Gunn was crouching by the door, with his back toward us, hugging his arms about himself and evidently eavesdropping upon what went on in the stateroom. As we watched, Silver swung his right arm and dealt Gunn a blow which knocked him head over heels into the main cabin. The steward emitted one agonized howl and scuttled under the cabin table. Silver wrenched open the stateroom door and poked his head inside.

"Well, well, if this ain't a touchin' picter!" he remarked. "Bill, I see you're doin' the kind and dootiful by our lamented skipper. But anybody as knowed ye would expect it of ye. Is that the treasure-map?"

"What are ye goin' to do about it?" snarled Bones by way of answer.

Silver backed into the companionway, as if in mute obedience to a leveled weapon.

"Do?" he repeated. "That depends, Bill. We'll see what the crew has to say."

"Aye, that we will," retorted Bones, and his voice vibrated with undisguised triumph. "Who's to come a'ter ye, cap'n?" he added.

"I ain't goin' to die, Bill," came Flint's mournful wail. "Where's the rum, Darby? I'm a-burnin' wi' thirst."

"Who's to come a'ter ye, John?" pressed Bones remorselessly.

Silver indulged in a mocking laugh.

"Aye, he knows what to answer!"

And Flint echoed him gaspingly:

"Bill's mate. He—has—map."

"Satisfied?" jeered Bones.

"I be, Bill," Silver assured him. "But we'll put it to the crew first, all fair and reg'lar. And whatever they say, Bill, you remember I'll be watchin' ye. Don't try any tricks wi' that map. I'm ready for ye, and if ye start tricks we'll put the Black Spot on ye."

"To —— wi' you and your Black Spot!" roared Bones. "Get out o' here afore I take my knife to ye."

Silver stumped toward us, his face distorted with rage.

"He has it," he rasped. "—— him for the shifty scoundrel he is! Well, the next move is for ye to plot, Master Ormerod."

"I see it not," I said coldly.

"Wait till he thinks o' the maid here," replied the one-legged man and hopped out on deck.

From Flint's stateroom Darby's voice rose in protest.

"Take your hand off me, ye— Ah, if he wants the rum do be lettin' him have it! Sure, what will it matther——"

" 'Tain't no use wastin' good rum on a dead man," said Bones, chuckling thickly.

There was a gurgle of liquor, and Flint moaned:

"Where's my rum? Fetch aft the rum, Darby McGraw!"

"Ah, ye black-hearted wretch!" shrilled Darby. "May the banshees whistle for ye, and— I'll not! Beware do ye touch me, I say, or I'll——"

The door of the stateroom crashed open again, and Darby was bundled out into the companionway.

" 'Tis bad luck, and not good, I'll wish on ye!" he screamed.

Bones' ugly face was projected from the doorway long enough to squirt a stream of tobacco-juice at the boy.

"Be off with ye, ye red-haired rat," he growled. "You and your luck! Aye, 'tis fine luck ye brought to John Flint, wi' the rattles in his throat."

"Darby McGraw!" wailed Flint. "Ho, Darby! Fetch aft the rum, Darby McGraw!"

The stateroom door slammed shut on the dying man's plaint, and Darby stood for an instant shaking his fist at its panels.

"May the priest fall dead that would be sayin' mass for your soul!" he cursed. "May him that offers ye bite or sup put the bitter poison in it! May ye never know sleep that will rest ye or kindness that— Ah, but what will be the use of it all? For there will be nothing but just the fires of hell to punish one that's as bad as you."

He turned wearily and saw me, and the tears trickled down his freckled cheeks.

"Oh, Masther Bob, I doubt me the cap'n dead or close to it, and Bones he—he—drove me forth, for—for fear I'd spy on him, says he—and him wi' the treasure-map he blanhandhered from Flint in his weakness! By the Rock o' Cashel, I'm finished wi' pirates. They're a poor lot. Leave us go home."

"If we only could, Darby!" I said.

He dashed a grimy paw across his eyes and gave me one of his shrewd looks.

"Troth, Masther Bob, I'm thinkin' we're none of us like to live else," he answered.

CHAPTER XXIII

CAP'N BILL BONES

CLUMP-CLUMP-CLUMP went the heavy sea-boots up and down the echoing length of the companionway, and the mutter of voices beat an accompaniment to them.

"Aye, there he lies."

"—— me, was there ever such a mug?"

"Ah, but ye'd oughter ha' seed him afore Long John put the pennies to his eyes!"

" 'Tain't right to put pennies to John Flint's eyes, him as handled onzas like other fellers does fardin's."

"Are ye daft, mate? Ye'd never put gold in a dead man's shroud!"

"Mebbe not! Mebbe not! Not to be sewed up, no."

"Ah, what's it matter? He's dead. The river'll have him——"

The clumping became a measured tramp as four tall seamen carried out the canvas cylinder that had been John Flint. A babble of grief from Darby broke the silence. We could hear him even where we three were huddled in Moira's stateroom, biding what the future held for us.

"Glory be to God, and him gone overside in all his sin! Och, St. Bridget and St. Patrick and Blessed Veronica and Holy Mark, do ye intercede for him! Let ye cry upon the Virgin to be speakin' for him in the heavenly courts. Oh, wirra, wirra, wirra, evil he was, and good in his way, and there's none by to give him the chance of purgatory!"

A roar from Bones.

"Stow that guff! Here, a pair o' ye strangle the mick if he'll not hush."

Darby whimpered and was still.

"Down-stream," continued Bones. "Here, to port. Ease him up. Where's that shot? Is it fast? Let him go, mates!"

A splash.

"And now who'll say as Bill Bones is not cap'n o' the *Walrus?*" demanded Bones, gruffly menacing.

Peter touched my arm, pushing open Moira's door very gently.

"Ye'll not be leaving me?" she breathed.

"*Neen,*" he denied. "But we better hear what they do."

Bones was talking again as we stole into the deserted companionway. He sat on the barrel which Flint had been used to occupy. A battle lanthorn hung over his head, and the pale yellow light showed him to be nigh as drunk as his dead commander.

"—and to —— wi' luck! He was a good pal, Flint was; but he thought too much o' luck. I'm a seaman, I am. Give me sun *and* stars, and I'll steer ye a course. Give me sight o' tops'ls, and I'll fetch ye 'longside o' a prize. I'm no man for fuss, I'm not. Ye can ha' all the rum ye want, so be ye sail the ship and fight her.

"Now, what ha' ye to say? Speak up, any o' you swabs as is for trouble!"

Long John Silver spoke from the shadows, his words flowing smoothly with an insinuating, oily inflection.

"We better make it all reg'lar, Bill. You're mate, and you say as how Flint give you the treasure-map and says you was to be cap'n a'ter him; but reg'lar's reg'lar, and it don't do no harm to——"

Bones pulled a stiff, crackling sheet of map-paper from his breast, and waved it in the air.

"Here's the map," he declared. "Long John there was a'ter it, but Flint give it to me, as he says."

"Sure I says it, Bill," proceeded Silver, undisturbed. "But what I says, too, is as we'd oughter have a 'lection as the Articles provide."

A murmur of assent greeted this declaration. Bones scowled.

" 'Tain't necessary," he returned. "I'm mate, and I'm the only real navigator ye got. But go ahead and 'lect whoever ye please—only remember I got the treasure-map."

"Yes, you got the treasure-map, Bill," agreed Silver, and his voice somehow became more hateful than ever. "But we don't allow as it's yours, ye know. You're what the lawyer sharks calls a trustee. You keeps it for the rest o' us, and we—" he chuckled venomously—"why, we keeps our eyes on you, Bill."

Bones swore.

"Get on wi' the 'lection," he adjured the crew. "Who's to be cap'n? Speak up and name some one!"

A dozen sycophants shouted "Bones,"

with a vim which inspired him with sweating vanity, and several called out: "Silver!" and "Long John!"

"Anybody else?" challenged Bones.

Nobody answered.

"Well, Long John," he leered, "it seems like 'twas you 'n' me. The Articles says them what votes for one feller goes to one side, and them what votes for t'other goes opposite. So, seein' as you're on the port side, I'll say them as votes for you goes port and them as votes for me goes sta'b'd."

"Suits me," grunted Silver.

There was a subdued rustling and patter of feet as the men divided, and the lanthorn-light revealed two unequal groups on either side of the mizzen, with Bones sitting on his barrel between them. Probably three-fifths of the crew had voted for him.

"Well, Long John," he said without trying to repress the triumph in his tones, "d'ye want to tell over the vote?"

"No," replied Silver briefly. "You win."

Bones rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Ah, I win, do I?"

"I said yes."

The opposing factions regarded each other like packs of wolves preparing to dispute the carcass of a fresh-killed moose. I suspected for an instant that they would fight, but I misjudged Silver's self-control. Galled he might be, but he did not permit the sting to his pride to influence his policy.

"You win, Bill," he repeated, "and I'm the first to wish ye joy o' it. And seein' as you're dooly elected, s'pose you tell us what your plans are for the ship?"

"Plans?" answered Bones warily. "What plans might ye mean?"

"Are ye for liftin' the treasure on the two islands or beatin' up for more?"

Bones reflected. He was not nearly so clever as Silver, and I imagine he knew it. He feared a trap, but study as he might he could not detect any pitfall behind the innocent question.

"I'll be guided by the crew," he announced triumphantly. "You're gentlemen adventurers, all o' ye. Name your wishes!"

This time the crew looked instinctively to Silver for a lead.

"We got plenty o' treasure in them island caches," he replied tentatively. "Speakin' for myself, I'm for collectin' what we got, takin' three or four ships and dividin' up for different countries, accordin' to what men seek. There's enough waitin' for our spades to make us all comf'table for life, and them lads as wants to go on the Account again can easy do it. Turn over the *Walrus* to 'em if they fancy it. I don't care. But some o' us ha' had enough o' the sea, and we'll try our ease ashore."

A shout of approval capped this speech. There was not a man but was lured by the prospect of thousands of pounds to spend on the right side of the gallows. And like all sailors after a series of hard voyages they never wanted to see a ship again—or so they thought.

Bones was enthusiastic for Silver's plan as any.

"Aye, aye," he applauded. "Long John has the right idea. We'll water tomorrow, and then we'll try for the Dead Man's Chest."

And he began to shout drunkenly the song that Flint had died singing:

"Fifteen men on the Dead Man's Chest—
  Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle o' rum!
Drink and the devil had done for the rest—
  Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle o' rum!"

Other men joined in, and as if by magic pannikins of rum appeared. Bones drank several whilst we watched.

"You drink wi' me, bullies!" he hailed his supporters. "An easy skipper is Bill Bones. Rum for all, and to —— wi' discipline!"

They howled joyfully over this, and what I had expected to provide a free fight seemed about to develop into nothing worse than such an orgy of intoxication as occurred almost every night aboard the *Walrus*. But it did not suit Silver's plans to have all restraint cast off at that point. He stumped forward into the circle of lanthorn light, with Pew, Black Dog, Darby and a dozen others at his back.

"Belay, mates," he cried. "We got a vast task to settle here. Time to carouse afterward."

"There's no time for drinkin' like the time ye ha' the liquor at your elbow," retorted Bones.

"And them's true words," assented Silver heartily. "And 'tis plain to be seen as you're a skipper the lads'll all be blithe for, Bill. But I was just figgerin' as we none o' us has ever asked the pris'ners how long 'twill take to dig up that treasure o' Murray's. So I makes bold to suggest we have 'em up here and put 'em through their paces. 'Tain't no ways right as pris'ners should be as close-mouthed as Flint let 'em be. He was a good messmate, Flint was, but I allus thought them swabs pulled the wool a mite over his eyes, blow me if I didn't."

I could see Bones slowly run his tongue over his lips, blinking his eyes the while. He liked this idea. So did the crew. They were in the humor of baiting whoever were at their mercy.

"Have 'em out," ruled Bones. "Long John's right."

"Aye, have 'em out," yelled the crew. "Make 'em dance!"

Silver's hard, polished-agate eyes glinted around the circle of savage faces and came to rest upon Bones' sodden visage.

"Run aft, Darby, there's the sweet lad," he said, "and bring us the pris'ners."

"Not—not—her!" answered Darby haltingly.

"Yes, *her*," replied Silver with a slight emphasis.

And one of his hands reached out, and his strong fingers tweaked the Irish boy's ear. Darby yelped.

"O' course, you bring her," Silver continued. "Why's she too good to tell us what she knows, mates? Just because she had Andrew Murray's favor, I wonder!"

"Not——"

Darby started to protest again, but Silver cut him off with a word that dripped chill ferocity.

"Skip!"

"Fetch up the wench, boy," growled Bones, "or I'll give ye a taste o' Murray's triangles."

"Fetch her up!" howled the crew in rabid chorus. "Let's ha' a look at the wench!"

Darby started toward us with the tears running down his cheeks. We could see him picking his way slowly through the crowd. A man kicked him as we watched. Poor Darby! He had been Flint's favorite, and there are always men in any crew to hate the captain's pet.

I LOOKED at Peter, and he met my gaze with dumb foreboding.

"We might take to the water," I said.

Moira spoke behind us.

"You will do no such thing," she answered. "Nor will I. We are not yet in such evil case."

"You don't know——"

"They would surely overtake us," she argued. "No, no, Bob; we must wait and pick a better time if we can."

"*Ja,*" approved Peter. "Dot's right. I t'ink——"

He hesitated.

"Silver will be nursing some hidden plan," supplemented Moira.

"*Ja,*" he said. "How didt you know?"

"I guessed," she said. "Glory, I will have been listening behind ye this quarter-glass, for I had a feeling in me there was new wickedness astir. But here's Darby, and for his sake we'd best be going quickly."

Darby fronted us with a gulp.

"Silver bade me——"

Moira slipped between Peter and me and dropped her hand on his shoulder.

"Don't ye be taking heed to what they say," she comforted him. "Faith, 'tis you are the grand knight, Darby lad, and I am that proud o' ye I could be giving ye a bit of a kerchief or gaudy ribbon to wear in your hat—only that ye will have no hat and me neither ribbon nor kerchief! But let's be after trying what the rogues want with us."

And out she marched at the boy's side before one or the other of us could step ahead.

The ranks of pirates parted to admit our procession, and we threaded the shadows to the edge of the central pool of light where Silver leaned upon his crutch. He moved aside to make room for us, and I found myself at his right hand. Perhaps fifteen feet away Bones sat on his barrel, his coarse face flushed and shiny, his cruel eyes devouring Moira's lissome grace. The scores of others were just so many vague blurs to me, but Moira frowned about her with a kind of high pride that turned the boldest stare. Peter looked stolidly over the heads of the throng. It was his way when he fronted danger; behind their mask of fat his little eyes were darting daggerwise from face to face, probing, guessing, estimating.

Silver spoke first.

"Well, here they be, Bill."

Bones' tongue traveled the circuit of his lips twice before he replied; he did not once take his gaze from Moira.

"A proper wench, ain't ye?" he fawned.

"Do ye tell me so!" she exclaimed.

And the pirates screeched with laughter.

"Lusty, ye are," sneered Bones. "Ye need tamin', and I ha' a hankerin' to take ye in hand."

" 'Twould take ten of your like," retorted Moira, nose in air.

Silver interposed in the midst of a second burst of laughter. I had to admire the scoundrel's deftness. He contrived to appear to be coming to the rescue of Bones in such a way as to rouse all the man's resentment against the cause of the implied humiliation.

"Sure, mistress," said Long John very respectfully, "what the cap'n would know is how long it should take to shift the treasure Cap'n Murray had ye bury on the Dead Man's Chest?"

Moira's nose remained in air.

"If ye were not afraid of the hard work it would maybe take ye as much as the half of a watch," she answered.

He addressed me with equal respect, requiring confirmation of what she had said. I gave it, as did Peter.

"And is it far from the shore?" he asked her then.

"Some would say yes, and some might call it over near," she flashed.

At that Bones slid off his barrel.

"Tamin' is what I said ye needed, and tamin' is what ye'll get, my girl," he announced. "Leave the rest to me, Silver. I'll take her aft and soon find out all she knows."

"There's Rule Four, Bill," said Silver quickly.

"Blow Rule Four! Murray and Flint wrote them blasted Articles, and they're both dead. Why should we, as are free gentlemen adventurers, have any tomfool rules like we was a King's ship? I'll take the lass and chuck five hundred pounds o' my share o' the treasure into the common fund in pay for her. —— me, lads, d'ye grudge your cap'n a little fun?"

Men shouted, "Yes" and, "No," but nobody was inclined to interfere.

"Come on, my pretty," he invited Moira.

She met his hot eyes with level scorn.

"Do ye put your finger on me, I'll either be the death of you or myself," she warned him.

He laughed uncertainly and started toward her, and as I lifted my foot to step between them the hilt of a knife was thrust into my right hand.

"Go to it," Silver's voice bade me. "Tell him ye'll fight for her."

I finished my step automatically and found myself a pace inside the pool of light surrounding Bones' barrel. Bones himself had come to a halt and was examining me with some evidence of disconcertion.

"He says he'll fight ye for her, Bill," Silver called officiously over my shoulder, and as Bones discharged a streak of curses, he muttered in my ear:

"Put your mark on her. That's old buccaneer law."

And as I still hesitated, scarce understanding him and unwilling to remove my eyes from Bones, who was drawing his own knife:

"Go on, ye fool! Anywhere! A cross on her hand'll do—wi' your knife!"

Moira heard him and grasped his meaning. She shot her left hand under my arm.

"God be good to ye, Bob," she whispered. "Sure, I'm yours."

And with the point of Silver's knife I traced a crimson cross upon her palm, certes, the oddest betrothal any couple ever had.

"Mistress O'Donnell is pledged to me," I called as loudly as I could. "Further, we had the word of Captain Flint that no harm should be done to her or any of us."

"Flint's word was no better'n mine," grinned Bones. " 'Twas only as Flint had no use for women, but I'm different, and first, I'm goin' to ha' ye caught and flogged, Buckskin, and then I'll cut your ears off for a keepsake like."

He waved his arm carelessly.

"Pull him down, mates. I can't be bothered fightin' a pris'ner."

Several of his cronies made to obey this command; but Silver, Black Dog and a number of others set up a protest.

"Give the Buckskin a fair show," they shouted. "He's put his mark on her. Took her himself, he did, when Murray carried the *Santissima Trinidad*."

Bones' friends hung back. From the rear ranks of the circle came advice and opinions of all shades. But Silver's faction must have been primed for the incident, for they worked up such a furor in my support that they swayed the general opinion by sheer volume of noise. Silver even raised Moira's hand with the bloody cross upon it and held it up for those behind to see.

"Fair play for all," proclaimed his stentorian voice "The Buckskin was one o' Murray's crew, and he took the girl in fair fight. He's put his mark on her, and if he wants to fight for her he can, pris'ner or no pris'ner."

Bones observed the mounting turmoil with an obvious mingling of emotions. He realized he had been tricked, but he did not yet see how it had been done or comprehend the ulterior purpose of Silver's strategy. To do him justice, I do not believe that he feared me or doubted his ability to kill me in a knife-fight, for I had never had occasion to exhibit my skill with the knife before the pirates. He simply knew that he had been lured into a position where he must fight personally to maintain his authority over the crew, and the initial flare of his hatred was naturally directed against me. But he did not forget Silver.

"I'll mind this," he flung at the one-legged man as he crouched forward to meet me, knife poised across his chest and left arm extended to clutch at my knife-wrist or parry a stab from the side.

" 'Tain't my doin's, Bill, if ye will ha' the girl," remonstrated Silver. "I warned ye o' Rule Four. And the cap'n's all the same as any other in a question o' honor."

"That's right," shouted a score of throats. "Cap'n's got to meet anybody."

"I'll meet some others a'ter I finish this swab," gritted Bones.

I circled away from him, gaging the effect of the swaying lanthorn-light upon the deck shadows and the feel of the pitchy planks underfoot.

"Stand to it, —— ye," he snarled. "Don't let him break from the ring, mates. I want his heart for that wench to chew on—and mind the fat Dutchman doesn't jump on my back. He's a bad 'un, he is."

Silver was prompt to summon half a dozen men to block off Peter, who, having seen me use the scalping-knife of the frontier since childhood, was not in any way concerned as to what I should be able to do against a half-drunken sailor whose one idea of knife-fighting was to grab his opponent's wrist at the same time the opponent grabbed his, and then strain and heave until one of the pair tore loose and struck.

"Don't ye worry, Bill," counseled the one-legged man soothingly. "We won't let the Dutchman nor nobody else harm ye. Just you hop in and gut the Buckskin—if ye can."

"If I can!" hissed Bones. "Watch me!"

He dropped to all fours and bounded into the air in a clumsy fashion—not at all as an Iroquois warrior would have done it, hurtling like a projectile, with his whole body behind the knife. I stepped to the left and stabbed down, aiming to drive inside the collar-bone. But the light or something fooled me, and my blade slashed his cheek from eye to mouth, a great, searing cut that laid open the whole side of his face.

He bellowed with surprize, and I was put out myself, for I had thought to finish him. Not a man moved for two or three breaths in the circle around us, for none had expected to see the fight terminated so quickly. Moira told me afterward that it was comical to see how Silver's jaw gaped.

Bones staggered back, the spurting blood blinding him so that he had to feel his way. I followed him slowly, half-prepared for a ruse, and he must have heard me, for he called out:

"Don't let him slay me, mates! I can't see, and he's a-comin' a'ter me!"

At this a dozen pirates jolted in between us, cursing and threatening me, and I gave ground toward where my friends were standing with Silver. The one-legged man hopped out to meet me. But I had scant satisfaction from him. He snatched the knife from my hand and, bending low, spat at me with a scorn words can not possibly convey:

"Ye bungler! As good as blind, and ye didn't do for him!"

And he swung by me on his crutch, hallooing to his friends:

"They're after Black Dog yon! Lay into the dirty swabs, mates!"

Knives were out all over the deck, and men were slashing and stabbing at one another. Bones was swallowed up in the mass of frantic humanity that milled around the restricted space between the butt of the mizzen and the rise of the poop.

A man plucked at my sleeve, and I spun about defensively to confront Peter.

"Where's Moira?" I panted.

"Darby took her. He has a plan for us to get free. Hurry, Bob! We got a goodt chance, *ja*. This is what Silver worked for, to hafe you kill Bones or set der crew against him."

I noticed that Peter steered me for'ard where the deck was deserted; but I asked no questions, for Silver's voice spurred me on.

"Lay aft, lads," he was shouting. "We'll show 'em what! We won't let no precious fool like Bill Bones go for to hold out that treasure-map on us. Couldn't even handle the Buckskin, he couldn't!"

Moira hailed us from the shelter of the capstan.

"Will it be you, Bob? Oh, thank God, thank God!"

"And your hand?" I stammered.

She pressed it to my lips.

"There!" said she. "If you will be so chary of other places."

I strove to redress my fault, and she lay for one precious moment in my arms.

"Are you sure ye will have meant it?" she asked shyly.

"Meant it! Since the morning I heard the lilt of your voice in——"

A low whistle came from over the side to port.

" 'Tis Darby!" she cried. "He slid down the anchor-cable to get at one of the boats they will have lowered by the side ladder for the water-party was going ashore, and didn't."

Peter beckoned urgently from the rail.

"We don't talk," he ordered grimly. "We go."

There was a coil of spare cable handy, and we dropped it overside, sliding one by one into the jolly-boat which Darby held steady beneath the heft of the bowsprit. The *Walrus* had swung with the tide until her stern was toward the town, and Darby and I took the oars and rowed quietly along the mass of the pirate's hull in the direction of the scattered lights that represented Savannah. How beautiful they seemed to us, those tiny glimmers of rush-lights and lanthorns in a clearing in the wilderness! They spelled safety, perhaps home.

BUT we were none too sure of ourselves yet. The big vessel loomed over us, her gunports like a row of gouging tusks, her spars and rigging a monstrous net poised for casting. Her decks seethed with lawless men, fighting and running, with harsh outcries and the clashing of steel and an occasional pistol-shot.

We passed the cluster of boats moored by the side ladder, unwilling to risk the time it would take to cut them adrift. We passed the poop, where a particularly savage fray was going on. Men were battering at the door to the cabin companionway and one called to "roll up a chase-gun, and give the —— —— a round-shot in his belly."

We rowed on under the *Walrus*' stern, and there we came upon an amazing spectacle.

A longboat was always towed astern for the greater convenience in case there was a sudden necessity for its use at sea. This boat had been drawn beneath the stern windows, and a man was leaning out to lower a heavy box or chest which a second man was receiving into the longboat. The man in the longboat heard the rattle of our oars and gave us one lightning glance before he slashed at the mooring-rope and leaped to his own oars. The tide carried him immediately behind us, and I had a vision of a bloody face wrapped in an old shirt. If he knew who we were he gave no sign. He huddled on to a thwart and pulled downstream with the tide.

But the man in the stern windows was not so reticent. He leaned far out, wringing his hands and clamoring to be saved:

"Oh, Master Bones, ye wouldn't go for to leave poor Ben Gunn as stood by ye stanch to the end, and held the cabin door the while ye shot the bolt. Ah, and them —— villains are a-hammerin' it this moment. Don't 'ee go, and leave me like this! They'll keelhaul me, they will. They'll trice me to the cat."

"Back oars, Darby," I said. "We can't leave the poor fellow."

"And him with Bones!" protested Darby.

" 'Twas not his fault."

We rowed under the stern, and I called up to the steward—

"Jump into the water and we'll pick you up, Ben."

"Who're you?" he answered shakily.

" 'Tis Master Ormerod."

I could hear the blows on the door at the end of the companionway.

"Hasten, man! We can't wait for ever."

"And ye won't put me in a livery-shuit if I come?" he pressed.

"Not I."

He jumped without a word, and we hauled him, dripping, into our midst.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOME

A CHORUS of yelping certified to the invasion of the main cabin, but its note of triumph was changed to consternation as Silver's bloodhounds discovered that their bird had flown.

"Gone!"

"The —— knave's scooped us!"

"Boats, lads; boats!"

And presently the *click-clock* of oars behind us caused Darby and me to redouble our labors. We drove ashore several rods down-stream from the town on the shallow bluff, and we dared not wait to seek shelter within its log walls. Truth to tell, we doubted now that the town itself spelled safety for us. The *Walrus'* carronades would make short work of such defenses as Savannah had to boast.

So we pelted up the bluff by a sandy path that debouched upon the cleared fields outside the stockade, urged on by that persistent oar-rattle and the shouts the pirates exchanged betwixt their several boats. Whether they were following us we could not discover, for the night was black as a cellar-vault; but we left nothing to chance, and ran hot-foot through the plantations of the citizens, overhearing, as we passed, the excited comments of the men on the firing-platforms of the stockade, who evidently anticipated an attack from their ugly visitor in the river. We never tarried for breath until we had gained the verge of the forest.

Peter was now in his element. He could find his way about a strange countryside by day or night as easily as a sailor could navigate the trackless wastes of the sea, and he led us in a beeline north and east in the general direction of the outlying settlements which intervened betwixt Savannah and the Carolinas. An hour or so after dawn we emerged upon a village in a clearing, whose inhabitants eyed us dubiously until Darby produced one of the golden doubloons from the store he had acquired during his reign as Flint's favorite.

These people had never before seen gold, and for a doubloon and an onza they sold us an old but serviceable musket with bullet-pouch, powder-horn and store of ammunition, and deerskin garments for all of us save Ben Gunn, who stoutly refused to don what he regarded as only another kind of a "livery-shuit." They also sold us a small quantity of salt and flour, and put us on the trail to Charleston in the Carolinas.

Of our journey thither I can say only that it was such an Odyssey as the frontier-dwellers of our provinces have long been accustomed to. To Peter and me its perils of forest and stream, red savages, and wild beasts, were far less formidable than those of the sea, and Moira and Darby thrived upon the experience—so much so that when at last, brier-torn and footsore, we entered Charleston's sedate streets and found awaiting us an ample choice of packet-ships to the north we four were unanimous for continuing our journey by land.

"*Neen,*" said Peter. "I don't ever go to der sea again, Bob."

"Ah, who would be fool enough in his ignorance to be wandherin' wet and bedraggled on the salt waves of the sea when he might venture the forests and be shootin' at the red deer and the bears and the catamounts and it may be an Injun, if he was in the full tide o' his luck?" snorted Darby.

"I seem to remember one was all for the sea, and would wave the skull and cross-bones in anybody's face," I jeered.

"Troth, and I knew less then than I do now," he replied unblushingly. "Them pirates was enough to break the heart of Pontius Pilate. Barrin' Flint, there wasn't a one of them would be able to hold his own against such as us."

"Silver might——"

"He was a clever one, Long John; but he'll be in throuble, you see if he's not," insisted Darby. "Too graspin' he is by half."

"I care not how much trouble he is in," I said. "I want never to see him or any of his crew again."

Moira, sitting beside me on the settle of the tavern-porch, twined her arm in mine with a slight shudder.

"Never again!" she cried. "And if it will be the same to you, Bob, we'll stay off of the sea. I like fine the clutch of the earth on my feet and the whispering of the trees. Men may be cruel on the land, but faith, they're never so cruel as the cruelest of the seafarers. And all my days when I hear the rumble of the surf and the suck of the tide running out I'll be thinking of himself that lies so far and lone under the Spy-glass—and of Master Murray, God rest his poor bones, and many another. The sea had them all! Ah, Holy Virgin, what a hunger it has for men!"

But Peter shook his head solemnly.

"*Neen,*" he said. "Der sea did not take them all. They died from der greed dot cankered in their hearts. I do not like der sea, but der sea is like der landt. It works *Gott's* will."

We were silent for a space, looking out upon the busy life about us, the negroes in their bright bandanna headdresses, the planters passing on half-thoroughbreds, the decent townsfolk in hodden-gray.

"And you, Ben Gunn?" I said to the steward who sat across the porch from us. "Will you come north with us? My father——"

He jumped up, writhing and twisting in an excess of embarrassment, aye, and with something of fear in his face.

" 'Twas yourself was promisin' me I'd not ha' to wear a livery-shuit," he protested. "And before that ye said as how ye'd find me a berth as a real, tarry sailorman, a-pullin' on ropes and standin' tricks at the wheel. Yes, ye did, Master Ormerod; and I believed ye, I did—though there's a many think naught o' foolin' poor Ben Gunn."

"I'll not fool you, Ben," I answered. "If you would go to sea, to sea shall you go."

And on the morrow I found him a berth upon a Barbados packet, cautioning him to employ discretion in discussing his past life, lest he be handed over to the Admiralty officials as a former pirate. He was our last link with the infamous company that had owned the joint rule of my great-uncle and John Flint, and what became of him or of the remnants of Flint's crew aboard the *Walrus* I do not know to this day. But from the fact that the *Walrus* was never reported again I have suspected that she must either have been wrecked or voluntarily abandoned by her people. She left Savannah within twenty-four hours of our landing there—so much I discovered by correspondence with a merchant of that town.

Did she put back to the Rendezvous and ransack the island's surface for the treasure Flint had buried? Or did she try for the gold we concealed on the Dead Man's Chest? Hopeless ventures, either of the two! As well search for a certain grain of corn in a heaping bin.

And what happened to Bill Bones? Did he elude the pursuit of his deserted comrades and seek an opportunity to lift Flint's treasure for himself? I'll swear that was his intent from the first—precisely as I'll take oath that had Silver been first to get his hands upon Flint's map he would have plotted so that only he and a small circle of his immediate familiars should have shared in the prize. Ruthless scoundrels, one and all! But perhaps Bones never won clear. Perhaps Silver fastened upon his trail and pursued him with that fantastic vengeance they called the Black Spot. I have often wondered what it might be.

As to the treasure, they are welcome to it or any part of it if they can find it. Moira and I talked over the desirability of notifying her Jacobite friends of the hoard that was buried on the Dead Man's Chest, and for a time she leaned toward this course; but after she had dwelt a while in the Hanoverian prosperity of New York she revolted against the idea of taking any step which would embroil the peace of the realm, and any lingering doubts in her mind were dissipated by the Titanic conflict of the Seven Years' War, with its world-wide convulsion of nations that set armies marching to battle all the way from the parched plains of India to the forests of our wilderness country.

"Here is no time to think of Hanoverian or Jacobite," said she. "We will all be English together."

"Der Irish, too?" asked Peter gravely.

"Troth, the Irish will be the best English!" she cried. "Unless it be the Dutch."

But I am galloping ahead of my story. Drop back across the years—'tis no more of an effort than it was for us to slide down the cable over the bow of the *Walrus* that night off Savannah—to the settle on the porch of the tavern in Charleston. Ben Gunn was disposed of; our plans were made for the northward journey along the seaboard. All that remained to be done was to come by a priest to wed Moira and me; and that, it seemed, was impossible short of Baltimore, in Maryland. Yet at the last our luck held, for the day we were to start turned stormy and we delayed our departure; and that afternoon a French West Indiaman put into the harbor under stress of the weather. Among her company was a kindly Franciscan, and he readily agreed to perform the ceremony.

For the rest, we rode into New York about four of the clock on the afternoon of April the 24th, in the year 1755. My father was in the counting-room of our house in Pearl Street, and he came to the door at the sound of the horses' hoofs on the cobbles. The sun was sloping out of the west full into his eyes, and for the time that it took me to dismount and swing Moira down from her saddle he stood dazed, fearful lest the dazzling light was playing tricks with him.

"Is it truly you, Robert?" he cried. "But it must be, for there are Peter and Darby."

"Yes, father," I answered. "And I have brought home another."

He opened his arms with an eager smile.

"There's room here for two of you, boy. Certes, you have but followed in my footsteps and fetched home a wife from your adventures."

"She is the little Irish maid I——"

"Whoever she is, she's more than welcome. But come in, come in, the pair of you. Safe and well—and with a wife! Robert, I can scarce credit it. After a whole year! Peter, God bless you! I knew with you he'd come to no harm. Ah, Darby, you have more sense in that red noddle of yours than when you left here; and if you stuck by Master Robert y'are forgiven. What a tale you'll all have to tell!"

That night as I lay in the upper room I had occupied since childhood I was aroused by a distant clatter and jangling which became louder and louder. At the corner it broke off with a heavy clang, and a pompous voice proclaimed:

"Past twelve o'clock of a fine, bright night, and Master Robert Ormerod is home from his captivity amongst the West Injin pirates. God save the King and the worshipful magistrates of New York!"

'Twas Diggory the watchman; and, listening to him, I recalled how Silver had cozened him the night I was kidnaped, and thereat I fell a-chuckling until Moira stirred sleepily and complained—

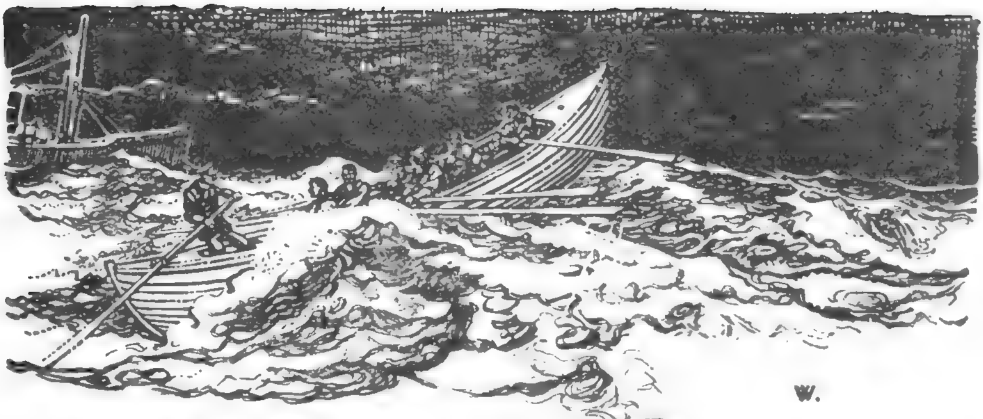
"'Tis an ill thing if ye'll not sleep the first night we will be in your own home, Bob."

"No, no, sweetheart," I said. "I was but thinking what an odd bundle of accident is this life we live. For if that fellow braying upon the corner had not been a stupid fool I should never have seen you after I took you to the Whale's Head."

"Do you think so!" she retorted. "Then 'tis you will be the fool, for if Captain Murray had not carried you after me I should have contrived to return to New York, though it kept me treading the highways and byways of the world come fifty years. Now get you to sleep! I am none of your wives to encourage a husband in loose fancies and romantical longings. Your wandering days are by and done with, and the sooner you square your back on them the better will I be pleased. I'll not let you forth again, and of that you may be prime confident!"

So I turned over and went to sleep.

THE END



SEAMEN ALL

by John Webb

Author of "The Best Defense," "According to Hoyle," etc.

"LET go, aft."

Captain McGuire's voice, clear and ringing, in contrast to the harsh bellow usually associated with shipmasters, rose high above the rumble of winches and the hiss of escaping steam. He waited for the shout of assent and when it came, turned and faced forward.

"Let go, for'rd," he called. "Let go, Mr. Tenny."

The chief mate, on the forecastle head, held up his hand to show his understanding of the order, and spoke quickly to his men. The eight-inch dock-line—the lines had been "singled-up," thus leaving but one line holding the vessel forward—was slackened so that the longshoremen on the pier could lift it off the bollard. The capstan began to revolve in readiness to haul in the big rope as soon as it was cast off from the pier. Mr. Tenny glanced at the seaman who was "surging" the line coiled about the revolving drum of the capstan.

"Watch Allen," he said, indicating a small man who stood near the rail, by the chock through which the line ran; "when 'e gives ye th' word, haul in."

"Aye," said the man.

"Aye!—aye what?" barked the mate.

"Sir," completed the man, his big, moon-like face showing no change of expression.

Mr. Tenny nodded sourly, and going to the off-shore rail leaned over and looked aft along the side of the ship.

The half-dozen sailors grouped on the forecastle head glanced at one another and shook their heads. They frowned at the mate's back; they looked from him to the hawk-nosed little man pacing impatiently to and fro on the bridge, high above them; they cast sorrowful glances over the bow at grimy West Street.

On each face, with the exception of that of the stolid Scandinavian at the capstan, was written worry. For this was the *Hawk;* and was it not common knowledge that the *Hawk* was a hell-ship? They knew what to expect from old Tenny and Captain "One-Two Mac," the bucko. Even "Cockney" Allen, the boatswain, hard-bitten veteran of many ships and many seas, shook his head and looked thoughtful.

Boatswain Allen nodded to the Scandinavian and made a motion with his hand; the hawser tightened about the capstan-drum and began to come in through the chock. The ship trembled with the sudden thresh of the propeller; she began to go astern, out of the dock. Yellow mud, churned up by the propeller, came from under the stern, swirling forward along the little freighter's sides.

Allen swung on his heel and opened his mouth to shout, but his words were drowned out by a sudden ear-splitting blast as the *Hawk* warned other river craft that she was leaving her slip. The hawser sprang taut and the *Hawk's* bow veered sharply toward the pier. Mr. Tenny dropped from the off-shore rail to the deck and held up both hands, palms outward, to the bridge, meaning "stop"; but even as he did so there was a jangle of a bell, and the throbbing of the engine ceased. The "leaving-dock" warning came to an end.

"'Vast—'vast heavin'!" Cockney was shrieking. "Slack aw'y, slack aw'y!"

The big hawser stretched out to one half its diameter, and before the strain could be taken off parted with the report of a whip multiplied many times; and like a huge whip it lashed high in the air. The ship, now released, and still having stern-way, crashed against the pier, and grated and slid, displacing a string-piece and scraping yards of paint from her own side. The propeller thrashed again, violently, and the vessel came to a halt.

Captain McGuire's face was dark and forbidding and there was a smoldering, angry light in his somber eyes, but otherwise, outwardly at least, he was calm and controlled. He was a middle-aged man, of average height or a bit under, slender, trimly-built and youthful of carriage. He moved about with a slow, easy grace, with short, cat-like strides and a rolling swing of his shoulders—and these shoulders, by the way, were a bit too wide to carry out the trimness of the slender waist and narrow hips. His hair was black, with just a touch of gray at the temples. He stood rolling a brown-paper cigaret and peering through the steam that escaped from the capstan-engine under the forecastle and swept across the vessel's bow.

"What's the damage, Mr. Tenny?" he called.

"Lookin' now, cap'n," came the mate's voice.

And then, after a pause—

"Lifted a string-piece off o' th' pier an' scraped some paint off th' side; thet's all, I guess."

"All right. When we get away from the dock, go below and see if she's opened up anywhere. Are you clear now, for'rd?"

"All clear, sir."

Captain McGuire glanced aft, and then spoke to the third officer at the annunciator.

"Half-speed astern, Mr. Downs."

"Half-astern, sir."

Captain Mac went to the bridge-rail and called over the weather-cloth to Mr. Tenny—

"Mister, who was heaving in that bowline?"

"Larken, sir," came the answer. "A. B. seaman."

"Well, send Larken, A. B. seaman, to me. D'you hear?"

"Aye, sir."

The pilot, a big, bearded man who stood in one wing of the bridge, waiting to take the *Hawk* down the channel to Scotland Lightship, raised his eyebrows and winked at the second mate.

"The little man's getting a flying start this voyage, lad," he said in a low tone, with a motion of his head toward Captain Mac.

"He never bothers me," said Downs, and he shrugged his shoulders unconcernedly; but there was a grim set to his lips which did not escape the observing eyes of the old pilot.

"No, of course 'e don't," said the pilot. "One-Two Mac don't bother anybody, but —I notice 'e sails with a new crew o' sailors every voyage."

Mr. Downs shrugged his shoulders again, but said nothing.

The ship was clear of the slip now, and pointed down-stream. Captain McGuire turned to the pilot.

"She's all yours, mister," he said.

The pilot assumed command with a short nod of assent.

Larken, come in answer to the summons from the bridge, waited uncertainly at the top of the starboard ladder. He was a man well worth looking at, this Larken; a blond giant of a man with the mild, trusting eyes of a faithful dog.

All Scandinavian sailors, in the language of the sea, are square-heads, but there was nothing about the physical make-up of this man to suggest squareness, except a moral squareness which was written plainly on his big face and shone from his clear, blue eyes. His head was round, and set firmly upon rounded, sloping, heavily-muscled shoulders. His blue, cotton shirt failed to come together at his throat, and beneath it an enormous, bulging chest rose and fell. His mouth and ears were big and his eyes were big and blue and clear—and honest. His legs and arms were thick and heavy, the latter slightly bowed, and the cloth which covered his biceps and thighs was stretched tight by great swelling muscles.

In short, he was a mountain of a man, weighing hardly less than two hundred and fifty pounds, and the flesh which covered his mighty frame was solid and healthy—not fat. He may not have been overburdened with intelligence, few really big men are, but he was clean and honest, and every bit a man.

"You're Larken?" snapped Captain Mac, looking up at the big face towering above him.

"Yes, sir, aye—I am Larken. Torkel Larken, sir."

He spoke slowly and painfully, like one whose English comes hard.

"You're the fellow who parted that brand-new, eight-inch line?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you do it?"

"I mistaked the bo's'n's signal, sir. I——"

"You what? What did you say you did?"

"I mistaked the——."

"Can't you speak English? What are you, a Swede?"

"I am doing the best I can, sir," quietly. "I am a Dane, sir."

A slow flush crept over the big man's face and a hurt look came into his eyes. Larken was pardonably vain of his English, and the captain's slur at his ability to speak it hurt more than a blow would have. Also, for some reason of his own, the Dane does not like to be taken for a Swede. Larken pondered deeply for a moment, frowning and biting his lip in the endeavor to frame his sentence properly.

"I did not understand the signal which the bo's'n gave, sir; I made a mistake."

There was a triumphant light in Larken's eyes.

"The fault was yours."

"Yes, sir."

"And you came aboard as a capable seaman."

If there was one thing in the world Larken understood, it was seamanship; he was a good sailorman, and he knew it. He was proud of his seamanship. His flush deepened, and when he spoke some of his laboriously acquired English had slipped from him.

"Ay bane good seaman, sir," he said stubbornly. "Once ay bane pilot on de Skagerrack long tam."

"You're a lubber."

"Ay bane good sailorman——."

"An apprentice boy would know enough not to heave in until he was told."

"Ay bane good seaman, sir. Ay——."

Captain Mac reached out suddenly and dug his fingers in the tender flesh at Larken's waist. He closed his powerful fingers upon the flesh within his grasp and twisted, slowly but relentlessly. The big seaman did not flinch; in spite of the excruciating pain he stood stiff and straight and silent, his face expressing nothing but surprize and puzzlement.

Mr. Downs turned away, shaking his head. The man at wheel stared into the binnacle and muttered black sea oaths under his breath. Mr. Tenny, just come up from below, stroked one lean, brown cheek and blinked his faded old eyes. Mr. Scott, the second officer, just come from aft, started forward as if to interfere, but he shook his head and turned away, gulping angrily. Only the pilot, a stout-hearted old seaman, who in his younger days had been something of a bucko himself, spoke his thoughts.

"Let up, Cap'n Mac," he growled. "Can't you see by the cut o' the man he's an A number one seaman? I guess you made plenty o' mistakes yourself when you was a fo'c's'le-hand—and I guess you make 'em yet, sometimes."

The little fighting man's eyes, when he turned them upon the pilot in a look so threatening that the black-bearded man involuntarily threw up one arm as if to ward off a blow, were like smoldering coals about to burst into flame.

"Stand away!" the captain snapped; and the pilot started back, for the moment completely cowed.

Captain Mac gave a further wrench at the flesh which he still held; and at this moment the giant decided he did not like it. He reached down and took the captain's wrist in his left hand, and with his right hand he pried open the fingers, easily and with no show of effort, as a man would open the fingers of a child. Then he stood quietly waiting, a mild reproof in his eyes but no animosity.

One-Two Mac turned to the others as if nothing had happened. His eyes had cooled and he was almost smiling.

"Please call me at Gedney, mister," he said pleasantly and, looking neither to the right nor left, strode into his room at the after end of the bridge.

Tenny dismissed Larken with a nod, and the big sailor went below. The others stared at one another questioningly.

"It's no use," said the mate, running his fingers through his thin, sun-bleached hair. "Cain't figger 'im no matter how hard ye try. Cain't never tell what he's gonna do nex'."

"He was scared," said the pilot knowingly. "The big fellow had 'im scared."

"No, he wasn't," broke in Scott. "Capt'n Mac wasn't afraid of Larken. He has his own reasons for walking away like that. I had a battle with the captain one time, you know—right here on the bridge. He knocked me down three times, cold as a pickerel the last time, and then—he ran! Ran into his room and left me piled in the wing o' th' bridge. I don't know why."

"I'll tell you why." Downs spoke emphatically. "Cap'n Mac isn't the bully people say he is. He's a fighter, yes; but you'll notice his opponents are always able-bodied men; and he never beats up a man any more than he has to in order to win. Take the fight he had with Scott, for instance: he knocked Scott down three times, and then ran away. Here's why: He knew Scott wouldn't—well—" he smiled—"he knew Scott didn't have sense enough to know when he was licked; so Captain Mac quit to save him further punishment. He can't help fighting, it's in his blood, but he's not a brute. That's my idea, anyway; and I think that's why he turned away from Larken."

"Rats!"

The pilot gave a short order to the man at the wheel, spat disgustedly to leeward, and turned again to the group of officers.

"D'you mean to say he let that squarehead get away with it because he was afraid o' hurtin' 'im? Rats! The man would ha' broken 'im across his knee."

"No, he wouldn't have," disagreed Scott. "Larken would not have been able to put a finger on him. Trying to hit One-Two Mac is like trying to hit a darting mosquito with an ax—I know! A fight between the captain and Larken would be like a fight between a big, lumbering elephant and a tiger."

"Or between a thirty-thousand-ton freighter and a torpedo-boat," supplemented Downs.

* * *

IT WAS long past sun-down. Highland Light still bore over the starboard quarter and Barnegat, over the bow, flashing intermittently, was a pinpoint of light in the darkness. The breeze had freshened out of the north. The obsolescent little freighter wallowed toward the south before a long, following sea and beneath a clear sky.

The hatches had been battened, the booms lashed securely in their cradles, the boats gripped down, and the last of the West Street mud washed from the decks, and Cockney Allen, tired and grumbling, as becomes a good sailorman, looked into the forecastle before going to his own room, which he shared with the carpenter, beneath the bridge. The men, all completely fagged by the fourteen-hour sailing-day grind, were sprawled at ease about the small triangular compartment.

Some, still fully dressed, were in their bunks, others, half-asleep, on their backs upon two benches bolted to the floor, were automatically and unconsciously balancing themselves to the roll of the ship. Forward, on the floor with his back against the out-curving bow-plates, Larken blinked sleepily over a ragged, dog-eared volume. On the walls sou'westers, oil-skin coats, and boots swayed and banged, and about the floor were scattered sea-bags and articles of clothing.

"Still at it?" asked Allen of Larken. "You'd ought 'a be —— well fagged by now."

"I am," said Larken.

He stood up, tucked the book beneath the mattress of his bunk, and stretched wearily.

"I was looking up a word."

"What word?"

"Mistook—or misunderstood; I don't know the difference between them yet."

"Mistook—misunderstood? Well—well, I guess I don't know either, Tork. Looks like you've got beyond my teachin'. I never had much schoolin' myself when I was a nipper, you know. How'd you come across that word, anyway?"

Larken explained.

"Why, ——, that was my fault that th' line was parted," exclaimed the boatswain, "I give you th' signal too soon. Did you tell th' Old Man that?"

"No, I just told him there was a mistake."

"You didn't take th' blame yourself, did you?"

"No," lied Larken.

Allen searched the big man's face suspiciously.

He sat down on the end of a near-by bench and watched him as he prepared to turn in. A man in a bunk behind Allen sat up and began to unlace his shoes. Larken took off his shirt and hung it on a hook.

On the big Dane's side, standing out strongly against the fair skin, creamy white and smooth as a healthy child's, was a purpling blotch, a bruise.

"What's that?" asked Allen, pointing to it.

"Huh? Oh!" Larken, confused, looked at the blotch wonderingly. "Oh, that—Why, I slipped on a ladder and—and fell on top of one of the winches."

He began busily arranging his bedding.

The man behind Allen finished a noisy yawn and kicked off his shoes.

"He's a liar," he growled. "One-Two Mac near twisted th' belly off 'im on th' bridge."

Cockney Allen was a small man, but fiery, and he had a fighting chin. He stood up now, and his jaws squared aggressively.

"For partin' that line?" he cried.

"Yep."

The informer threw himself in his bunk and stretched luxuriously.

"Larken told th' Ol' Man that he did it."

"Well, strike me pink!"

Allen strode up to Larken and thrust out his chin at him.

"What in —— did you tell 'im that for, you big over-grown lout! Ain't I big enough to take th' blame for what I do myself? Huh—ain't I?"

Larken looked down at him and half-smiled, then caught himself.

"Ah, well, what's the difference?" he asked. "It's over now."

"Is it? Well, it ain't!"

The little boatswain thumped the table with his fist.

"I'm going up there right now, an' I'll tell 'im th' truth if 'e knocks me bloomin' fice off. An' after this you min' your own —— business!"

"No, no!"

Larken reached for Allen, but the smaller man dodged under the outstretched arm and sprang to the door.

"Hey! Wait a minute, bose."

"Big" Malley, a big man, but not so big as Larken, slid from his bunk in time to block the doorway. Malley, with the exception of Old Frank, the store-keeper, was the only one of the sailors who had sailed in the *Hawk* before.

"Wait a minute, bose. Take a shot o' dis."

He took a quart bottle from his berth and drew the cork with his teeth.

"Take a shot o' dis to spunk yuh up."

Allen took the bottle, but hesitated before putting it to his lips.

"Don't look at it dat way," said Malley. "Dat ain't back-room hootch; it's good ol' rum—five-star Barbancourt. Brought it up wit' me las' trip. I keep it fer medicine purposes. Take a good swig—you'll need it."

He waited, grinning, while the boatswain took a good "swig."

"An' listen: I wanta tell yuh how to fight One-Two Mac, in case he starts anything. Like dis, see."

Malley turned his back to Allen and made the motions with his arms and legs of a man who is running for dear life.

"Like dat, see. An' don't stop."

"Yeah?"

Allen cocked one eye at Malley and bared his teeth in a snarl.

"I ain't lookin' for a fight with Captain Mac, you swab!—but if it comes I ain't runnin'."

"Oh, suit yerself, bose."

Malley shrugged his shoulders and took a long drink out of the bottle for "medicine" purposes.

"Suit yerself; but remember, I did me best to put yuh right."

"Yeah, thanks."

Cockney Allen stepped over the door-sill and went aft, toward the bridge.

THE master's room was but partially lighted, by a single well-shaded electric-bulb that threw a small circle of light upon the chart table beneath it. From the depths of a massive, upholstered arm-chair clouds of cigaret smoke rose into the air and eddied in the drafts of air that came in through the ports and half-open door. A man's leg was hooked over one arm of the chair and a foot swung in short, regular arcs. There came a sharp knock at the door.

The foot continued its swinging, but a voice from the chair said—

"Come."

Boatswain Allen, his cap in his hand, entered, re-hooking the door behind him.

He advanced a pace into the room and stopped uncertainly, trying to locate the captain in the gloom.

"Well?" from the chair in the shadow.

Allen turned quickly toward the sound and advanced another pace.

"Well, well! What is it, bose? Speak up, man."

The boatswain advanced again, then stopped and set his jaw determinedly.

"It's about this 'ere partin' o' th' bow-'awser today, sir."

Only silence, and cigaret smoke, from the chair.

"It wasn't Larken's fault, cap'n, that th' line parted."

"No?"

"No, sir, it wasn't."

"I didn't say it was."

"No, sir, but—but 'e did, sir. 'E's a good seaman, Larken is. 'E's as good a seaman as I am, every bit."

"Huh."

A snort and a slight chuckle, a sarcastic chuckle, from the chair. The cigaret glowed brightly, then described an arc in the air and fell hissing into an unseen receptacle.

Something about that chuckle of amusement angered Allen, angered and flustered him. And he felt himself to be at a disadvantage in not being able to see the man he was talking to. He began to talk wildly.

"Yes, 'e's a good seaman, a —— good one; an' e's a 'ard-workin', 'ard-trying big square-head, too, even if 'e ain't so quick at thinkin'. I been with 'im for four years. I been learnin' 'im 'ow to speak English—now 'e knows more than I do. I been goin' from ship to ship with 'im for four years, an' I know 'e's as good a seaman as I am."

Another snort of derision from the chair.

Allen caught the sarcasm of the sound and burst into open anger.

"Well, then, 'e's as good a seaman as you are, Cap'n McGuire; every bit as good. 'E's as good a sailor as you are a master—an' that's that!" he ended truculently.

From the chair in the shadow there was no sign that the strange little shipmaster was even listening to him. Allen felt like an actor, an actor making his first appearance, on a stage before an unseen, silent audience. He was nervous and confused, but, although he expected the captain to launch himself from the darkness at any moment, he was unafraid. His anger mounted.

"An' I'm a good seaman too, Cap'n McGuire. It was my fault that that line was parted—I give th' signal to heave-in too soon, an' th' stevedore on th' pier let th' eye slip back on th' bollard; but we all do things wrong sometimes."

"Oh—" from the chair in the shadow—"it was your fault."

"Yes, sir, it was; an' you went an' 'azed that big, good-natured slob for nothing. 'E thought 'e was doin' me a favor, 'e did. Serves us —— well right for ever comin' aboard this wagon—everybody knows th' *'awk's* a mad-house of a ship. I guess it'll be tougher for me than for th' rest, because I'm a limey. Some cap'ns an' mites ain't got no use for lime-juicers, I know that.

"But I got a piper in me sea-bag as says I'm an American, an' I guess th' bloke what mide it out knew what 'e was doin', even if I do drop a haich onct in a while—that's th' way I learned to tork when I was a little nipper shootin' snipes in th' streets o' Cheapside. But it ain't me I'm thinkin' about, it's Tork Larken. Th' wie you twisted 'is belly—for nothin'—a big, good-natured stiff that wouldn't 'urt a fly. You know ruddy well it wasn't right, cap'n; you know it wasn't—strike me blin' if it was!"

"Is that all, bose?"

There was a peculiar note to the voice: whether of warning, derision, sympathy, or understanding, Allen could not at the moment decide. He stood his ground, however, and finished what he had come to say:

"That's all, cap'n. I didn't come lookin' for trouble, sir; I jus' come to tell you that Larken an' me are men, sir, and so are th' other lads in th' fo'c's'le, an' expec' to be treated like men."

"Now that that's off your mind you feel better—eh, bose?"

"I—I—. Yes, sir."

"Good enough." Very quietly.

There was a movement in the chair, and Captain Mac came from the darkness into the range of the light. He went to the door and held it open.

"Good night, bose," he said.

As the Cockney passed, wary, half-expecting a blow, the captain reached out and half-pushed him, half-slapped him on the back, then he put the door again on the hook.

Allen walked off in a daze.

"What th'—what th'—now what kin' of a w'y is that for a bucko to ac'," he muttered. "Did 'e let me get aw'y with it, or is 'e goin' to lay for me? An' that push? Was 'e sore, or was it kinda friendly like? ——! I donno."

SOMEWHERE in the belt of equatorial calms a tropical hurricane "made-up." It swept westward over the Lesser Antilles and into the Caribbean, then it swerved and traveled north at the rate of fifteen nautical miles an hour. It cut the eastern end of Hispaniola, crossed the Windward Passage, and swerved again, sharply, toward the northeast.

Radio storm-warnings were frantically broadcasted from land-stations and ships. The hurricane, stately, unhurried, traveled on toward the north, leaving in its wake foundered ships and flattened villages. With an entire disregard of the rights of man and beast it rolled on, over rich and poor, virtuous and wicked, pious and impious. It mingled the wreckage of church and brothel; it attacked the hospital-ship and the rum-runner with equal fervor; it razed schools and gin-mills alike. It swerved not a hairbreadth from its assigned course for Christian prayers nor Vaudoux rantings, but rolled on, impartial, relentless, demanding victims, an elemental Juggernaut.

Captain McGuire, in the chart-room, from a series of radio reports which he had before him, was plotting the course the storm would most likely take from its last reported position.

"Will ye turn and run, cap'n?" asked Mr. Tenny anxiously, peering over the captain's shoulder.

"Run? Where—up an alley?" Captain Mac smiled thinly.

"Well, goldurn it, ye can't mean to keep on th' way ye're goin'."

"That's just what I mean to do. Look here."

The captain placed the point of his dividers on a penciled marking to the south and west of San Salvador.

"There's where she was at eleven o'clock this morning—two hours ago. She changed her course and swung toward the nor'east. We're directly in its path now—too late to haul about and run north. Our only chance is to make all the speed we can, and try to get inside the curve of it. Is everything about the decks secured?"

"Aye, sir—an' a Bristol-like job of it."

"Good. Tell the engineer to hook her up, give her all the speed he can."

THE sun went down that evening behind a mass of high-piled, feather-like clouds. The mass thickened and piled higher, and a pale pink tint crept up from the western sky-line. The breeze died and the surface of the sea became like oiled glass. The clouds climbed higher and deepened in color from pink to red, then darkened slowly to purple.

A long, easy swell began to come out of the southwest, but still there was no breeze; and the sky became black. The swells increased in height and length, and the *Hawk*, trembling and throbbing with the churn of her old engines, plowed southward through great smooth hills of purple water.

"She's a-coming, durn it!" said Mr. Tenny, on the bridge with Captain Mac. He indicated the swelling sea.

"It's pushing these swells on before it."

Captain Mac nodded, glancing at the barometer, which was falling at the rate of fifteen-hundredths of an inch an hour.

"We're within eighty miles of it," he said. "At this rate we'll be in it, or clear of it, perhaps, by ten o'clock."

"Aye," muttered Tenny, "most likely in it."

"Call me when the breeze comes up again. If it's from the west, we'll have no trouble; if it's from the south, we'll have a good chance of getting through without damage; if it's from the east—" Captain Mac smiled grimly, looking at Mr. Tenny —"grab something and hang on!"

At nine o'clock the first breeze came, just a single puff of warm air—from the south. Captain Mac came to the bridge and altered the course from south to south-southeast.

"That'll fetch her out of it," he said, "maybe."

Another puff came, and another, each stronger than the one before, a series of them; and then a steady breeze, mild at first, but rapidly increasing in force. White-caps sprang up, and the lowering clouds thickened and spread until not a star was visible. The gentle breeze became a fresh breeze, a strong breeze, and then a gale. And still this was not the hurricane;

it was only the atmospheric disturbance running ahead of the hurricane.

At ten o'clock the storm came down upon them in full force; a ripping, tearing, shrieking wind that sent the *Hawk* far over on her side. The gale was from the southwest now, and it caught the little vessel abeam before she could be headed into it.

"Hard a-port, quartermaster!" sang out Captain Mac. "Hard over!"

Like a wet dog the old freighter shook herself, and tons of water rolled over the lee bulwarks into the sea, then she set herself stubbornly to the task of hauling sixty-five degrees in the eye of a ninety-mile-an-hour gale. Comber after comber rolled over the starboard bow and fell crashing into the waist, lifting triple tarpaulins and wooden hatch covers like so much paper and matchwood. Everything movable, and many things thought to be unmovable, was torn loose and swept over the side.

A number of barrels, deck cargo, broke their lashings and caromed about the waist like so many billard balls, sometimes rolling, sometimes sliding, sometimes tumbling end over end. The gale increased, ninety-five, a hundred miles an hour, forty pounds pressure to the square foot, shrieking and howling, an inferno let loose; and still the *Hawk* fought up into it, groaning and complaining and trembling with the strain, but fighting stubbornly like the thoroughbred she was.

The engines had been slowed to relieve the strain on the thrashing propeller, often entirely out of the water, but still there was power enough to bring her around, and she came, slowly, fighting for every inch. This was but the southern rim of the hurricane, which was spinning from right to left, counter clock-wise, about a center many miles to the north. Could the *Hawk* but hold her own the storm would soon pass over. The wind, now coming from north of west, proved Captain Mac's judgment to be good.

Mr. Downs, at the captain's order, switched on the small searchlight which the *Hawk* carried and threw its beam down into the waist. Four men were there, Allen, Larken, Big Malley, and Old Frank, all armed with fire axes. They were chopping at the flying oil barrels, to relieve them of their contents and thus render them less dangerous. It was hazardous work, but they stuck to it, and soon all the barrels, but one, were empty. As they emptied the barrels they watched their chance and heaved them over the side.

Together they started after the remaining barrel, which had become wedged between a hatch-combing and a winch. They scrambled and fought their way across the tossing, slippery deck to the barrel, and Allen, in the lead, raised his ax.

At that moment the ship gave a sudden angry lurch and the bow fell with sickening speed into the trough. The barrel moved, worked loose by the sudden lurch, and as the ship mounted again, like a horse taking a hurdle, it sprang like a live thing from its position and started after the Cockney. Larken, to save the boatswain, threw himself at the barrel, but the edge of it caught him solidly in the side and sent him spinning.

Allen, seeing his danger, turned to run, but slipped, and slid, with the heavy barrel, to the port rail. The barrel hit first, and kept going, leaving a gapping hole in the wooden bulwark. Allen tried frantically to dig his heels into the hard-wood deck, but fell on his back, and shot through the opening made by the barrel.

Torkel Larken, in his hand a life-ring snatched from the forecastle, sprang into the lee shrouds.

"Life-ring for you, Tommy!" he boomed, and sent the ring flying far over the side.

"Man overboard!"

"Hard a-starboard!" sang out Captain Mac. "Pick up that life-ring for the bo's'n with your light, Mr. Downs. Put your helm hard down, quartermaster."

"Ye're goin' to let it catch us a-beam!" screamed old Tenny in warning.

"Away life-boat! Take your men aft, Mr. Tenny, and cast adrift the starboard whale-boat."

"It's murder," cried Tenny, trying hard to raise his cackling old voice above the howling gale. "It's murder, I tell ye! I ain't goin' in no boat!"

"I know you're not," shouted back the captain. "I'm going. Get aft, now, —— it, get aft!"

Mr. Tenny floundered off, got down the ladder somehow and started aft.

"No'east is the course, quartermaster," said the captain. "Mr. Downs, keep your beam on that ring. D'you see bo's'n?"

"Yes, sir; he's hanging to the ring."

"Good. Mr. Scott, stop the engine."

"She won't have steerage-way, cap'n."

"I know it, man, I know it; but I don't want to get cut up by the propeller. When I get away from the side tell Mr. Tenny to follow up and give me a lee. D'you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

Captain Mac plunged down the ladder and ran aft. The boat had already been cast loose from its lashings and was swinging from the davits, with the sailors hanging on to the inboard gunwale to steady it as much as possible and keep it from breaking up on the side of the ship. The gale, slightly abated, now took the *Hawk* on the port side, and she went over to leeward, slowly, twenty, thirty, forty degrees, and she did not come back, but lay that way, held by the pressure of the wind on the weather side. The davits, inclined far over the water, held the whale-boat clear of the ship's side, in good position for lowering. But below tremendous seas were foaming and roaring, licking high in the air, as if anxious to snatch the frail craft and devour it.

"Volunteers to go in the boat," called Captain Mac.

"Volunteers to go with One-Two Mac!" shouted Big Malley, himself advancing.

The fighting buckos of the sea have a way of inspiring confidence, even the confidence of the men who hate them. Eight men stepped forward, six of whom the captain chose: Big Malley, Torkel Larken, Old Frank, a young American named Carey, a strapping big fireman, and an assistant engineer. The two rejected ones, and Mr. Scott, who had come aft after the captain, cursed at not being allowed to go in the boat.

"In the boat, men," ordered Captain Mac. "The rest of you stand by to lower away. Let her hit the water stern first, Mr. Tenny; and then let her go on the run."

The men climbed into the boat and those on deck lowered away. As they went down they fended the boat off the side of the ship with their hands, and when they were in the water the long sea-painter, fast to a thwart and led forward along the *Hawks* side, sheered them out from under the counter.

"Let go your painter."

The boat was cast adrift and the *Hawk*, having not yet lost all momentum, and being driven by the force of the wind on high sides, forged ahead and left them exposed to the full force of the sea.

"Out oars," ordered the captain, and he slid the long steering sweep into its crutch. "Give way, lads—and pull like ——!"

A line drawn between the whale-boat and Allen, indicated by the beam of light from the *Hawk*, would have been at right angles to the direction of the wind, but Captain Mac was compelled to head partly into the wind to overcome lee-way and to prevent being capsized in the trough.

The six men, all experienced oarsmen, bent to the work with a will, pulling with their backs and legs, and feathering their oars to prevent them being jerked from their hands by the tops of the rushing seas. The whale-boat climbed and fell, climbed and fell, and the six oars dipped and strained, or, often, missed the water and waved wildly in the air.

The whale-boat type of craft, long, narrow, pointed at both ends and fitted with air-tanks, is built for rough weather; but it needed all Captain Mac's seamanship, heaving with all his strength against the long sweep to throw the boat's head up, or off, as the occasion demanded, to prevent being capsized. He stood like an undergrown Viking in the sternsheets, hatless, coatless, his feet wide-spread, powerful fingers gripped about the handle of the sweep, broad shoulders swaying to the pitch and roll—and grinning crookedly, deridingly, into the eye of the tempest.

"Lay back, lads, lay back," he shouted. "To —— with the storm!"

As the boat began to do more than hold her own, to forge ahead, seas began to break over, and one man was forced to give up rowing to bail. But in spite of this they made headway, and in an hour had fought their way to where Allen, half-drowned and almost exhausted, clung to the life-ring. Larken, breathing in great gulps, aching in every limb, leaned over the gunwale and pulled the boatswain in.

And then came the rain, the rain that follows the hurricane. It came in great sheets that knocked off the tops of the savage combers and beat down the rolling swells. The wind died from a gale to merely a strong breeze. The *Hawk* swung around in a long circle to give them a lee and pick them up.

"Hook on, for'rd," said Captain Mac when at last they were alongside.

Larken, in the bow of the whale-boat,

reached up and caught the swinging lower block of the forward fall. He pulled down on it, overhauling the line with one hand, and then, watching his chance, he slipped the trip-hook through the shackle in the stem of the boat.

"All fast for'rd, sir," he called.

There was a peculiar, drawn expression on his face and his chest was heaving convulsively, but he smiled, weakly.

The captain hooked in the after end and straightened, keeping a strain on the fall to prevent it unhooking itself.

"All fast. Hoist away, Mr. Tenny."

There was the rumble of a revolving capstan and the falls tautened. Larken held his block in position until the falls took the weight of the boat, swiveled it half around to take out a turn, and then stood up, steadying himself with one hand on the gunwale. He looked at Captain Mac and tried to say something, but failed; and then his great body pitched headlong into the bottom of the boat.

Two leaps and Captain Mac was beside him.

"What's wrong with him—exhausted?" he asked, turning the giant over.

"Exhausted, me eye!" growled Old Frank, under his breath. And then aloud; "Half a dozen busted ribs, that's what. Had 'em since that oil-barrel side-swiped 'im in th' belly. I been a-wonderin' how long 'e'd stick it out."

"My ——! Two or three broken, anyway," said the captain, fingering the big man's side. "And why the —— didn't you tell me before we left the ship?"

He turned to Old Frank.

"I ain't lookin' to have my neck wrung, cap'n," said Old Frank, shaking his head, "an' that's what Larken said 'e'd do if I told."

LARKEN, in his bunk in the forecastle, smiled at Captain Mac, just entering.

"How do you feel?" asked the captain shortly.

"Fine, thank you, cap'n. I think you did a good job, sir, with the bandages."

"H'm. You were a fool to go in that boat; you know that, don't you?"

"Maybe, sir."

"Maybe! You were, —— it! And you were a mighty poor seaman to let that barrel catch you and break your ribs."

Again Larken's English failed him.

"Ay bane good seaman, sir. Ay——"

He stopped suddenly, puzzled by the strange light in the little man's eyes. For a moment the bucko's guard was down, and the great, true spirit which few were privileged to see shone forth. The real Captain Mac, the Captain Mac who hid behind a mask of hardness, was looking at him. Larken pondered deeply, his slow intellect groping for the answer. At last it came.

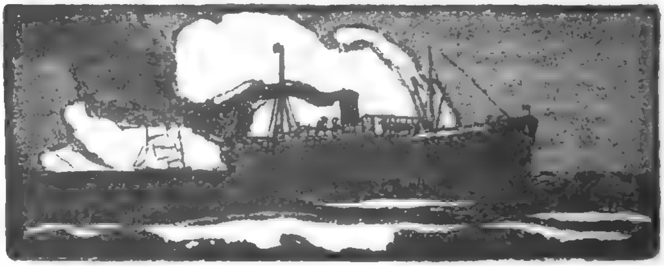
"And you're a good seaman, too, Cap'n Mac," he said. "And you're a——"

The little shipmaster stopped him with a gesture. He touched Larken lightly upon the shoulder, then swung about and started for the door. With one foot over the sill, however, he turned. He stood staring about the forecastle as if interested, as if he had never seen it before.

"I have a book," he said, trying to appear casual but really looking like a bashful boy, "er—'English Words and their Uses'. I'll bring it down to you if you would care to see it. And perhaps I could help you—er—if you—er——"

"Will you, cap'n? Thank you, thank you. I——"

But the little man was gone.



BLOOD AND FIRE

A Complete Novelette by L. Patrick Greene

Author of "Play Ball," "The Charm," etc.

According to Watson, Rhodesia's chief native commissioner, the District of Melefe was all that it should be. Its people were peaceful—at least they were never guilty of anything more violent than the inter-kraal knobkerrie fights which invariably brought to a proper conclusion the twenty-four hour beer-drinking orgies.

But these fights were nothing, less than nothing: They were purely domestic affairs and, therefore, to be completely ignored. A warrior race, like the Matabele, cannot be transformed into pacifists in the course of one generation—or three.

Watson knew—it was his business to know—and was officially cognisant of this: Melefe's people were paying their taxes regularly and were conforming to the letter of the many laws promulgated by the white men for the betterment of the native race—and, incidentally, for the benefit of the white men. Of the rest he professed ignorance.

Watson gave all credit for this roseate state of affairs in Melefe's district—and Melefe had been prominent in the councils of Lobenguella, when that king made his last stand against the rising tide of whites—to Symes, the commissioner in charge of the district, and treated with contempt the demands for Symes' recall made by a certain element of Rhodesia's white settlers.

These men slurringly referred to Symes as a "nigger lover," and wanted a man to supplant him who would throw open the district to them that they might enter and trade cheap scents, beads and rot-gut whisky for cattle—thus carrying on their share of the white man's burden. Only they didn't express themselves in just that way.

Missionaries never failed to mention Melefe's district in their long-winded letters home; calling it "A plague spot," "A district embogged in a mire of idolatry and devil worship," "A district still in the toils of witch doctors—and chief of these agents of evil is a white man, Symes, the native commissioner."

And they bombarded the chief native commissioner with petitions and letters from their home headquarters, asking that Symes be removed and a man more in sympathy with their work be appointed in his place.

With infinite tact Watson refused them; complimenting them on their success in devitalizing the warriors of this district, and the clothing of women in formless Mother Hubbards in that; he made attendance at the Mission Church compulsory in this district, and closed up a trading-store in that. But he insisted that Symes be left alone to work out his, and his people's, salvation. Watson knew of districts where five distinct creeds had missions within a radius of five miles and he sympathized with Symes' desire to spare his people such a confusing conflict of faiths.

As for Symes—his people knew him by many names: *Ekontze*, because of his bull-like strength; *Incubu*, is not the elephant the father of wisdom? *Inkosi*, for he had all the attributes of a king—Symes gave all credit for his success to Zari—Zari, the witch doctor, Zari, his friend.

"FROM Zari, *inkosi.*"

The smartly-uniformed native gingerly placed two twigs, bound tightly together, on the desk in front of the white man. Then he looked at his hand as if expecting to see it disintegrate.

"How do you know Zari sent these, Guffa? He did not give them to you?"

As he spoke the white man glanced quickly up at the native, then as quickly looked away. But that one glance was sufficient.

Guffa had prepared a wonderful story, a fitting explanation of how the twigs had been given to him; of how he had heard a voice say—yet there was no one near!—"Hold out your hand," and, when he had obeyed, the two twigs were placed in his open palm, materializing, it seemed, from nothingness. Then the voice had said:

"Take these to the white man. Zari sends them."

That was the story Guffa would tell, and believe as he told, to his comrades of the native police. His hearers' mouths would gape wide, their eyes bulge at this new evidence of Zari's fearful power; they would huddle together and whisper:

"*Au-a.* That is truly Zari's way. He comes and goes like a passing breeze which no man can see."

But now, having met the white man's clear gray eyes, Guffa answered simply:

"An *umfan*[*] gave them to me, *inkosi.* But perhaps he lied when he said that Zari sent them."

"Perhaps—who knows," the white man answered absently. Then, curtly—

"There is a beer-drink at the kraal tonight?"

"Yah, *inkosi.*"

"All right. You and the other police will go—to keep order."

There was a peremptory command in the last three words, a sharp insistence, and the white-toothed grin which had started to spread over Guffa's face was checked, cut off at its inception—vanished. His face assumed a wobegone expression and the white man, his hand shading his eyes, smiled.

"See that my horse is saddled and brought here," he said.

"Yah, *inkosi.* But the rest? Was it an order?"

"It was an order."

"Good! There will be no broken bones at the kraal tonight, and that is a pity: When blood flows, much evil is drowned."

"A thwarted thirst begets wisdom—of a sort," the white man answered dryly.

Guffa grinned, saluted smartly, and noiselessly left the hut.

Left alone the white man placed the twigs carefully in the drawer of his desk. They were symbolical of his friendship with the witch doctor. Years before Zari had given him two others, bound just so, and they were the most treasured of all his possessions. As the twigs were bound together, so he and Zari were united in a friendship which had stood the test of time.

Together they had faced many trials, always presenting a firm, unbroken front against the many agencies which sought to undermine and destroy their people's birthright: a childlike adherence to the Golden Rule, perfect physique and fear of no man—save, perhaps, Zari. But Zari was more than man; he was the Mouthpiece of the Great Great!

And now Symes rose from his chair and prepared for his journey to the hills, for the twigs conveyed this message to him: Zari wished to see him—to seek his advice, or to advise, to warn against some pending danger or, perhaps, merely to pass the night in friendly gossip.

Symes did not question the reason for the call, but made haste to answer it as he knew Zari would have answered, had he received the message of the twigs.

"Though death stood between us," Zari had once said, "I would come to you."

THE moon was rising when Symes left his hut, mounted his horse and rode in a bee-line across the veld, heading for the hills, ignoring the aimlessly wandering native path.

He rode fast, sitting his horse easily, a slouching seat, but one which so blended with the rise and fall of his horse's gait that it minimized the rider's great bulk. And, where the sturdy Basutu would have foundered under a poor rider weighing sixty pounds less than Symes, he was now full of play and affected to shy violently at the distorted shadows cast in the hard, cold light of the moon.

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[*] Boy.

After a while Symes was forced to ride more slowly, picking his way with caution, for the bush was getting thicker, the ground more uneven and strewn with gigantic boulders. He was getting nearer the hills, and surprized a band of baboons on their way to attempt the spoliation of some kraal's mealie-patch. The "old men" in the rear-guard turned and watched him suspiciously until he had passed out of sight.

Once Symes pulled his horse to a halt at the top of a slight rise and scanned the country round, endeavoring to locate the origin of the drum-beats which had dimly penetrated into his consciousness above the pounding of the horse's hoofs.

He heard them plainly now.

Ra-tat-a-ta-tat! Ra-tat-a-ta-tat! Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Funny!" he muttered. "That's no native signaling. Sounds like a kettle-drum and a big bass. Must be——"

He broke off with a laugh, refusing to give utterance to the absurd thought and, failing to discover the whereabouts of the drummer, rode on.

Half an hour later, at the edge of a large clearing not a quarter of a mile from Zari's hut, he slowed down to a walk that he might fill his pipe. Carefully he tamped down the tobacco into the bowl, sucked noisily on the stem to make sure he had packed the pipe properly, and lighted a match.

As he did so his horse snorted with terror, reared suddenly and swerved. Then he stood still, trembling.

Symes, the lighted match still in his hand, spoke soothingly to his mount, lighted his pipe, then looked to see what had frightened the beast.

Just a few yards ahead, and directly in the path he had been riding, was a momba—South Africa's most dreaded snake. Half of its body was raised in the air—a black column of steel-like muscles surmounted by a flat, venomous-looking head. Its beady eyes glinted and from its open jaws its tongue darted in and out with lightning speed.

Long years in Africa, familiarity with poisonous reptiles, had not made Symes contemptuous of snakes; on the contrary, his knowledge of the momba's habits and power increased his instinctive fear of the reptile.

In a half-panic he drew his revolver and fired as the snake started to move toward him, fully five feet of its slender, whip-like body still raised above the ground.

The snake offered a poor target, the moon-light was deceptive, but it was Symes' custom to devote an hour a day to revolver practise—it helped to while away the time and afforded a vivid demonstration of his skill to such natives as witnessed him.

Again he fired, and the slender column of death dropped to the ground as if it had suddenly been cut in two.

Then, making an unnecessarily wide detour, Symes rode on.

Ten minutes later, having unsaddled his horse, which he watered and turned loose to graze, he entered Zari's hut, not at all surprized that that man had not come out to greet him.

The hut was dimly lighted by a small fire; flickering shadows danced upon the wall. The *dhaga* floor was strewn with well-tanned skins of goats; baboons' skins hung on the wall and from the center-pole hung the symbols of Zari's craft: the jackal's tail used in the "smelling out" of witches; the leopard skin which told of his mastery over all animals; the necklace of snakes' fangs and human teeth, symbolical of his power over life and death—for the snake is the symbol of immortality. Also: When the teeth first appear, then life *is*, when they have gone, how far off is death?

Zari, his sparse frame completely enveloped in a large *kaross*, sat in a huddled heap beside the fire. He was very old—how old no man knew, though he must have lied when he claimed to have been present at the birth of the world!

"Greetings, *Incubu!*"

Zari's voice, at least, showed no signs of age. It was full, resonant, and his accents were pure—not slurred as is the speech of so many men of the tribe.

"Greetings, Zari!"

Symes sat down on a box which he dragged up to the fire. Not that he was cold, but because his host was.

The two men were silent for a long time—Zari, his eyes closed, seemed to be asleep; Symes methodically cleaned his pipe, throwing the ashes carefully into the fire.

"Did you hunt a little while ago," Zari asked suddenly. "I heard a shot."

Symes cleared his throat a little self-consciously.

"Yes—a momba was in my path. I killed it."

"That was a deed well done."

"I wonder," Symes said slowly. "I killed it because I was afraid. Is it good to kill because of fear?"

"Better to kill than be killed," Zari said with a low chuckle.

"But I know the way of the momba. I had only to turn out of his path, even at the moment he seemed to be charging me, and he would have gone straight on, seeking only to gain the safety of his hole—for I was undoubtedly between him and it. Instead, I played the part of a child."

"Maybe. But supposing you had allowed the snake to live, willing so to do because you had been able to turn out of his way: What of the next time? Again: Had you not seen him, or had you been unable to turn aside, would the momba have spared you?"

"No—but——"

Symes hesitated and Zari continued triumphantly:

"No! When a momba makes for his hole he has no thought for anything else and strikes at whatever may be in his way. So it is good always to kill a momba, when opportunity permits, lest the day will come when that momba will find a man who is unable to kill, unable to jump on one side—and that man will die. It would seem, then, that you have saved a man's life."

"Small credit," Symes said with a smile. "But you would not have killed, Zari?

"No, for all snakes are my servants—that you know."

Again there was a silence for a little while; again it was Zari who broke it.

"Some men are like mombas," he said sleepily.

Symes leaned forward and taking a red brand from the fire, held it to his pipe and puffed vigorously before answering—

"Yes?"

Zari nodded his head emphatically.

"Yah, *Incubu*. All white men are not like you, and among my people there are some whose speech is forked and whose thoughts are as crooked as the horns of Melefe's riding-ox."

"And some are like mombas, you say?"

"Said I so? No. My people can not keep to one path. They set out on a lion hunt and lo! an *inyoni inyosi* * flies before them. Straightway they forget the lion; they follow the bird and, finding the bee's nest, gorge themselves with honey. On the morrow they come to me for medicine and charms to cure their sick bellies. *Au-a!* In many ways my people are like the tailed folk. You whites have traveled further along the path, I think. But, as I have said, there are some among you like the mombas. They have only one purpose in mind and will strike at everything which stands in their way."

"But if their purpose is a worthy one, is there any blame?"

"Truly. For there is no middle way with them. Beer is good—but no man grows fat on beer alone. Who shall say that the food is good? Not the man who has had it thrust down his belly when he is not hungry.

"And, *Incubu*," continued Zari, warming to his theme, "when you meet a momba-like man do not turn aside for him. If you do, having achieved his purpose, he will set out again, and again, until he strikes a path from which you can not turn aside."

"And must I kill such a man when I meet him," Symes asked with a smile.

"It is not necessary," the witch doctor said, "to kill a snake in order to make it harmless. I know how to deal with them—I cut out their fangs—and I know how to deal with momba-like men. If you ever meet one—bring him to me. He is my meat."

Then, apparently irrelevantly, Zari asked—

"Heard you the drum-beats tonight?"

Symes started.

"Yes. What do they mean?"

"Have you not heard them before? But no, I forgot. You have been away—hunting for lion; or was it for men who have failed to pay the hut tax?—you would not have heard. But I have, for the past three days."

"Who is the drummer? What is the portent?"

"A momba sometimes hisses before it strikes," Zari said and would say nothing further about the subject.

And so the talk drifted to a discussion of the affairs of the natives of the district; Zari recommending leniency for this man in the matter of taxes, suggesting that another's tax be doubled. For in each kraal Zari had "ears"—men and women who sent him by word of mouth, or by drum-talk, the happenings of the day. Most of the news thus gathered was inconsequential gossip—but when, for instance, six different reports were to the effect that a certain warrior was gambling heavily, it was quite safe to assume that that man was not deserving of leniency; and when a man, hitherto mild and hen-pecked, was reported to be beating his wives because they did not work hard enough in the corn-patches, it was a fair inference that that man was thinking of taking another wife.

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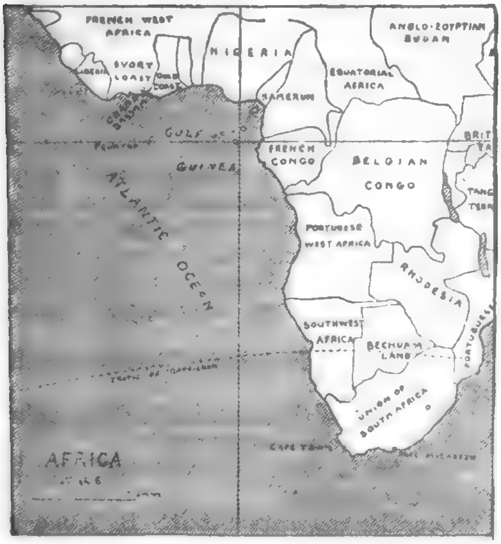
* Honey Bird.

It was partly by the cunning use of such information that Zari earned his reputation as a soothsayer.

Symes, too, did all that he could to strengthen Zari's hold on the superstitions of his people—knowing that Zari would not abuse that power.

It is easy to see how Zari made use of Symes' gift of a strong-lensed telescope, and the witch doctor would rarely condescend to make rain charms if his barometer pointed to "Set Fair." Not that Zari and Symes dealt only in trickery—though Zari insisted on its value, properly applied. Both men were expert psychologists and Zari, beside having a gift for cross-examination that would put many a lawyer to shame, was an extraordinarily clever herbalist and a powerful hypnotist.



Symes often found himself completely bewildered by Zari's great knowledge, his uncanny deductions and his forceful remedies for evil situations.

The night hours passed quickly as they will when two men, driven by the same motives and ambitions, get together.

Toward morning Symes made some coffee—he kept a complete stock of supplies with Zari—and when he had drunk it he rose to leave; and his leaving was hardly more ceremonious than his arrival.

"*Hamba gaghle*, big man," Zari said.

"*Shlaghle gaghle*, O wise one," Symes replied and passed out of the hut.

Quickly he caught his horse, saddled it and mounting, was about to ride away—anxious to be some distance from the hut before morning came—when Zari came to the door.

In that half-light of breaking day the witch doctor seemed to have thrown off the burden of age as easily as he could the *kaross*, which he now let fall from his shoulders.

"Do not forget, O *Incubu*," he called, "that it is always best to kill a momba, or in some other way render it harmless. Again, remember this: Some white men are like mombas."

Then, raising his hand in a gesture of farewell, he turned and reentered his hut.

For a few moments Symes sat motionless on his horse, a frown of indecision corrugating his broad forehead. Then he spurred his horse and galloped swiftly away.

SUNRISE—and it is one of South Africa's chief glories—for once left Symes unmoved, indeed he was unconscious of it, riding mechanically, engrossed with his thoughts, endeavoring to collect and link up the apparently irrelevant scraps of information imparted by Zari.

Symes was convinced that Zari intended to convey some warning, though it was quite contrary to the witch doctor's custom, when dealing with Symes, to entangle his meaning in a *wachtenbitje* bush of words.

Perhaps Symes was overtired, or looked too deep for the warning—at any rate it constantly eluded him, much to his annoyance; and when, presently, he heard the beating of the drums again, he pulled his horse up to a walk determined to find out who the drummer was; Zari was forgotten.

The sound came to his left ear, from the east, and turning his horse he rode in that direction.

"Must be at Tomasi's," he conjectured.

Tomasi was the headman of a large kraal half-way between Zari's hut and the kraal of Chief Melefe—but not in a direct line with them, the three places forming the points of an equilateral triangle.

Soon Symes came within sight of the kraal, though the untrained observer would have had difficulty in distinguishing the mushroom-shaped huts at the foot of a squat, truncated cone-shaped kopje. And even Symes was not sure whether the black objects which swarmed about the kraal were people, cattle or—astigmatic specks floating before his eyes.

The drumming sounded louder and louder—the kettle-drum beating a frenzied staccato like the crackling of machine-gun fire; the bass drum punctuating the "roll" with deep booming notes like the hacking coughs of a lion on the hunt.

And now, above the beating of drums Symes could hear a low, monotonous murmur and at the sound urged his horse to a better speed. He knew the significance of that sound—it is to be dreaded wherever it is heard; its register, its tone, its potentiality is universal. It was the voice of an angry mob.

Symes knew now that the black objects were warriors. They were brandishing knobkerries above their heads, shouting fierce threats as they milled about something, some one.

What—who—Symes could not distinguish.

At first Symes had judged it to be nothing more serious than a beer fight, and had smiled at the thought of the broken bones he would be called upon to mend on the morrow. But beer-fights were, in a sense, good-natured affairs—tests of skill and strength.

But this——

He drew his revolver and fired three shots into the air in rapid succession, hoping to distract the attention of the warriors from their purpose.

But the shots had no effect; the warriors were listening to something infinitely louder—to the elemental urge to kill!

Symes could now see the object of their anger. On the footboard of a wagon stood a white man and crouched beside him, evidently terrified, was a white-clad native. In front of the white man was a big bass drum which he beat with forceful precision—and each reverberating *boom* seemed to be a note of defiance. From a pole attached to the side of the wagon was a large yellow flag, which hung down and draped itself about the white man's shoulders. For a moment a passing breeze took hold of the flag, and Symes was able to read the legend which was written upon it in large, ill-formed letters of flaming scarlet—

BLOOD AND FIRE

Again he fired three shots and, without checking his pace, reloaded his revolver and rode into the midst of the excited, gesticulating horde of warriors just as some of those nearest to the wagon clambered up into it, and roughly took hold of the white man and his native attendant.

Symes, surrounded on all sides by anger-inflamed men, realized that an ill-considered move on his part would precipitate bloodshed, the consequences of which might embroil the whole country.

He fired again into the air, this time with tangible results, for all the men turned to look at him. Then, very ostentatiously, Symes returned his revolver to its holster and fastened down the flap.

This had the desired effect. Before such a demonstration of confidence, the natives wilted visibly—their blood-lustful expressions gradually vanished and they hung their heads in a shame-faced manner.

The men who were on the wagon released their captives, jumped to the ground and endeavored to lose themselves in the crowd.

Symes heard scraps of whispered ejaculations:

"*Au-a!* It is the *inkosi!* Now there will be a reckoning."

"The anger of that man is like the scorching heat of the noon-day sun."

"But he is just. He will not punish without a hearing!"

"Consider the marvel of it. He alone—and we so many!"

"Stop that confounded drumming," Symes shouted angrily as the white man commenced to beat his drum with renewed vigor; and as the man obeyed him, sitting down on the seat with the air of a man who humors a spoiled child, Symes demanded in the vernacular—

"Where is Tomasi?"

"He is here, *inkosi*," a warrior shouted, and those between Symes and the wagon opened up a path for him and he rode up to the wagon.

"Tomasi is drunk," the stranger said in a cold, metallic voice. "You don't need to talk with him, commissioner, not now. I can tell you all about the sins of this heathen people. Death encompassed me about on every side but my faith was strong and Jehova has delivered me."

Symes granted himself the luxury of a faint smile.

"You are not hurt, sir?" he asked. "No? Then, if you will excuse me, I'll try to clear up this mess before we talk any further."

Again he demanded in a loud voice—

"Where is the headman Tomasi?"

"Here, *inkosi*."

The voice came from under the wagon and, looking down, Symes saw the aged headman crawl from its cover on hands and knees and painfully pull himself erect.

Blood from a deep gash in his forehead had streaked his body with crimson, and he was covered from head to foot with bruises and minor cuts. He glared balefully at the white man on the wagon.

"*Au-a, inkosi*," he said in a high-pitched shrill voice, "you witness my shame."

"Unless the explanation is a good one," Symes said dryly, "a greater shame will be yours and this kraal shall know another headman. But now bid these brave warriors of yours—" he gestured contemptuously toward the anxiously watching natives—"to get to their huts."

"That I have ordered many times this morning," Tomasi said bitterly, "but, as you see, they are still here. Shall I then again expose myself to mockery?"

"Only a fool tries to cross a river at the flood," Symes replied. "The wise man waits until the waters have gone down. With these—" again the contemptuous wave of the hand, and those near him flinched—"the time of the flood has passed."

And so, encouraged by Symes' presence, and understanding that the white man with his "stick of thunder-and-lightning" stood ready to support him, Tomasi, in a voice quivering with angry emotion, ordered his people to get to their huts—and to stay there.

Then he waited breathlessly, tensed, for their answer. But his fears were groundless. The warriors suddenly seemed to be desirous of only one thing—and that to get away from the place, pushing and elbowing each other in their eagerness to seek cover that they might escape the scrutiny of Symes' penetrating gray eyes.

One, bolder than the rest, called out—

"There will be a just accounting, *inkosi?*"

"Most just and very swift," Symes assured him.

The native who had been crouching in fear beside the white man on the wagon, now rose to his feet and began to tap the kettle-drum which was strapped to his waist.

Ta-tat—tat—tat! Ta-tat—tat—tat!

It was an insulting beat, as if the man were thumbing his nose at the retreating warriors, and at the sound they stopped in their tracks and half-turned as if debating the wisdom of returning to rend the drummer limb from limb.

Symes wheeled on him furiously and the drummer laughed impudently, but, at a low-voiced command from the white man, let the drum sticks fall from his hand and squatted again on his haunches.

The warriors resumed their retreat and a few minutes later passed through the gate of the stockade which encircled the kraal, leaving Symes alone with Tomasi and the two strangers.

"Now, Tomasi," Symes said, "what is the story you have to tell? Speak quickly and with a straight tongue—and you, sir," he added curtly to the stranger, "you will have the goodness to keep quiet until I have heard Tomasi."

"Am I to understand this is a criminal trial, and that I am the criminal," the other said harshly, his normally pale face flushed a mottled crimson, contrasting painfully with the brick-red thatch of his head and his carroty mustache.

"As to that—you may please yourself; but you must understand that I am the first and last court of appeal in this district, and I shall expect from you a full explanation of the circumstances of your presence here—it's peculiar, to say the least."

"You will soon discover," the other exclaimed hotly, "that David Gideon represents a much higher authority than yours."

But Symes, ignoring him, turned to the headman.

"Now, Tomasi," he said encouragingly.

"It happened this way, *inkosi*," the headman began. "Last night, at the setting of the sun, this *umlungu* * came to my kraal and bought milk for himself and eggs and a fowl—some corn he bought, also, for his oxen. And we, seeing that he was a man of great wealth and one undoubtedly high in the favor of the Great White Chief, begged him to stay awhile with us. He said, "Yes," and the guest hut was made ready for him.

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* White man.

"Now, that due honor might be accorded him, I gave orders that the women of the kraal should make ready for a beer drinking. Secretly they were to make the preparations—the unlooked for is always more highly valued.

"Meanwhile the white man spoke to us, through the mouth of that black dog yonder, of many things, the fullness of which we did not understand: he spoke of strange things, of Spirits unknown to us and of another land up there—" Tomasi pointed skyward—"which is altogether desirable and can only be attained through much suffering and lack of pleasure in this land.

"This saying of his I recall:

" 'Blood must flow without ceasing, so shall you become white: the evil shall be put to flames, and so shall you escape everlasting fire.'

"Strange sayings, *inkosi*, and small wonder that we thought him a little mad, for how can black become white?

"When he had finished talking to us he and the black one sang—and beat continuously on the drums. My people could understand that and danced to the beat as men and women dance when the beer pots have been emptied. Aye, the beat of the drums was like fermented beer.

"Then the *umlungu* made it known to us that he was not well and wished to sleep. So, I gave orders that the beer should not be drunk that night, and saw to it that all the pots were placed in the shadow of my hut for safe keeping. Also I sent messengers to the people of Jhentsi's kraal bidding his people to drink beer with us on the morrow—which is today—that yet greater honor might be shown the *umlungu*.

"Now listen to the end of it. This morning, at that time when the bleating of goats and the lowing of cattle announce the beginning of a new day, we folks of the kraal were awakened by the beating of a drum. And the beat aroused in us—still heavy with sleep as we were—memories of the cries of warriors rushing to the attack.

"And so, snatching up our knobkerries, we ran from the huts, ready to give battle. And lo! We only looked into each others faces! But the ground about my hut was heavy with mud; it was as if the season's rains had burst upon us during the night—and the air was filled with the stench of well-fermented beer.

"The drum beats sounded beyond the stockade of the kraal and as one man we rushed through the gate, greatly puzzled. And then we understood all things.

"This *umlungu*, and the black dog his servant, had made a great fire of the gourds which had held our beer—the beer they had spilled upon the ground—they had burned, too, all the things which are necessary to the proper brewing of more beer. In the dark hours of the morning the *umlungu* had crept through our kraal, destroying that which is our life.

"Even so, there might no harm have come of it, for we judged him mad, had not the black dog, his servant, derided us and had not the drums aroused the blood-lust in my people.

"Then: remembering that no beer was in the kraal through this man's wicked folly, remembering also that the people of Jhentsi would mock and taunt us when they came to the feast and found no beer, then, I say, my people clamored for the blood of these two and would not listen to me, though I urged them to wait and tell all things to you.

"*Tchat!* Great is my shame! They struck me with their knobkerries when I endeavored to stand between them and the white man."

"And said the white man nothing all this time?" Symes questioned.

"He said nothing, *inkosi*."

"And did nothing?"

"Nothing, *inkosi*. Save that he beat continually on the drum, and the black dog told us that his master was sending a message to his Great Spirits who would assuredly save his Mouthpiece from our wrath, and punish us should we in any way harm him.

"But my warriors laughed at that for the black dog was gray with fear—his voice trembled. And then, *inkosi*—then you came."

Symes turned to the white man, David Gideon—

"Has your native servant translated Tomasi's testimony to you?"

"He has."

"And is it true?"

The other waved his hands—they were plump and white, the backs of them were covered with red hair.

"In the main, yes, though the poor deluded heathen has entirely mistaken my motives. I will explain them to you—later. I——"

But Symes impatiently turned his back on him.

"That is all, Tomasi," he said gently. "You have my leave to go. Let the women tend to your hurts; in a little while—when I have spoken to the *umlungu*—I will come to you."

"Then there is no blame—to me, or to my people, *inkosi*?"

"To you—no blame; to your warriors—small blame."

"It is good, *inkosi*," said Tomasi and started toward his kraal, hesitated, stopped, and turning, faced Symes again.

"But what about Jhentsi's people," he asked doubtfully. "How shall we explain to them?"

"I will ride to Jhentsi's kraal and tell him that I have forbidden the drinking of beer at your kraal until the full of the moon. So your shame shall not be known."

Tomasi nodded and continued dejectedly on his way; but as he neared the gate of the stockade he straightened himself, and walked as the headman of a large kraal, and captain of a powerful *impi* should walk; walked with the brisk assurance of a leader who is about to pass scathing judgment on the actions of his followers.

* * *

"AND now, Mr. Gideon," Symes said, turning on that man, towering over him as a Great Dane dwarfs a splenetic Pom, "what have you to say for yourself? I don't suppose you realize just what you have done! But, had Tomasi's people killed you, I'm not sure that they wouldn't have been justified."

"I've no doubt," Gideon answered suavely, "that you would have been only too glad to find justification for the murder of a fellow countryman who had the temerity to poach on your preserves. But I——"

He stopped short and smiled—a cold, hard smile—his thin lips tightened and Symes started slightly at the fanatical light in the man's eyes: He had seen that same light in the eyes of the hordes of the Mahdi when the desert tribesmen charged against overwhelming odds, content to die knowing that Paradise awaited them.

At a word from Gideon the native brought to him a black dispatch box. He opened it and riffled the papers it contained until he found the letter he desired. This, in a long white envelope sealed with the Government stamp, he handed to Symes.

"While you are reading that," he said, "Brother Samuel—" he stressed the word "Brother"—"and I will inspan the oxen. I have much labor to do in the vineyard; there are many heathen, wine-bibbers and drunkards, who need me to show them the error of their ways. I must waste no time in idle chatter."

Speechless, bewildered, Symes watched the two men—the fat, hard-featured, somewhat sinister-appearing white man and his grinning native companion—descend from the wagon and with much haste, but great lack of efficiency, proceed to round up and inspan the sixteen oxen which were grazing contentedly near by.

"Brother Gideon and Brother Samuel have a lot to learn," Symes murmured, and laughed softly as the native, in his eagerness to catch one of the oxen, was tripped by a trailing rope and sprawled headlong in the red dust of the veld.

"Samuel's feet are too big for his shoes, and—" he added as the native rose, crestfallen, deeply concerned because of his undignified appearance—"his brains are too small for his helmet."

Still chuckling, he sat down on the disselboom of the wagon and tore open the envelope. It contained two letters. One was official—from the chief native commissioner: to the resident commissioner, Melefe's District. The other was from Charles Watson to his friend John Symes.

Sir (the official communication read)

This will be handed to you by Mr. David Gideon, and you are hereby instructed to coöperate with him in such plans as he may advance for the welfare of your district.

During his stay with you, you are to consider Mr. Gideon your superior in the service.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant.

Symes whistled.

"The old duck must be the special pet of some of the Lord High Muckamucks. Must have a lot of influence behind him," Symes reasoned. "If that's really official the districts 'ud be in a state of open rebellion in less than a week—judging from what's happened already."

He was not greatly perturbed, however. Several times in the past he had received official communications which were just as revolutionary and, had he acted according to the letter of his instructions the effect on his district would have been, perhaps, even more disastrous than this promised to be.

But, always, with the official communication, Watson had enclosed a personal letter which informed Symes—though not perhaps in so many words—that the official communication was meant solely for Home consumption and that he could, if he deemed it advisable, ignore the instructions therein contained.

And so now, no doubt, this other letter from Watson would nulify the official communique. But that letter could wait. For the time being he would treat Brother David Gideon with all the meekness and deference a government official expects from a subordinate. At least he would so treat him until they were well away from Tomasi's kraal and in a place where there was no possible chance of being seen or overheard by curious natives: It is not wise that *they* should be permitted to witness the dissensions of white men.

He rose to his feet intending to help in the work of inspanning which was progressing very slowly. Then he was conscious that Gideon was regarding him intently and he found himself wondering if the man could read his thoughts, or had something more definite to go on than the contents of the official communication would suggest—though that was enough. Certainly there must be something back of the man's cool assurance.

Sitting down again on the disselboom he returned Gideon's hawk-like scrutiny and then, with something approaching panic, opened the other letter.

Gideon seemed to personify bigotry and narrow-mindedness. Looking at him, Symes found himself thinking of the zealots of history—of the black-robed fanatics of the Inquisition and of the harsh, uncompromising Puritan elders.

Then with a self-condemning gesture of impatience Symes put aside all such flights of fancy and concentrated on the open letter he held in his hands.

He read slowly—Watson's crabbed handwriting made a swift perusal impossible—and as he read the lines on his forehead deepened, he shuffled his feet uneasily, he muttered curses—reproachful curses, expressing dismay as well as indicating anger.

And having read the letter through to the end, he turned to the first page and read it again, stopping to analyse it sentence by sentence, hoping to discover something written between the lines that would give him an avenue of escape from the terrible position into which he was thrust by the official communication.

Dear Symes: (he read)

This is the hardest letter I've ever had to write to you and I know only too well how it is going to affect you. When I tell you that my official letter to you is actually official, there seems nothing more to be said. And it's so. Your first reaction, of course, will be to resign and I'm not altogether sure that I'd blame you if you did. But you won't—it would be too much like desertion in the face of the enemy and you're not that sort.

This David Gideon: At first I thought him a particularly poisonous insect, but now—well, I'm not so sure. He has a few good points. Any way, he has a most powerful backing and my hand was forced. I was compelled to give him a high official rating; he ranks all my resident commissioners and, as a matter of fact, I wouldn't be surprized to learn that he's my superior. I submitted my resignation, but they told me not to be a fool and refused to consider it. I'm glad of that now. By staying I can, perhaps, ward off any great calamity—or, if I can't, at least I'll be on hand to pick up the pieces.

I did try to steer him off into another district—but it was no use; you've got such a bad reputation with the black-coated gentry. So now, after years of immunity from outside interference your district is to be burdened with the biggest pest that ever came out to this country with a mission. What his modus operandi will be I leave for him to tell you. He'll be most glad to!

My advice to you is this: Support him—you have to do that anyway, there's no escape—with an outward appearance of loyalty. That will bring an apparent success to his wild scheme all the sooner, and with success he'll move on to some other district and you will only have the job of building your fences again. That's all.

It's a pity we can't slit his throat, that 'ud save a lot of trouble. But of course we can't do that—our civilization has made us too soft. Well, maybe he'll die of fever or some warrior will find him a good target for assegai practise.

The last paragraph caused Symes much thought.

"He can't mean that," he muttered. "Watson doesn't mean to suggest that I have Gideon killed. No! We don't do things that way. I wonder ——"

He lost himself in a maze of moody conjectures, wondering just what Gideon's line of attack would be. If this affair at Tomasi's kraal were a fair sample, Symes could see that a bloody rebellion would be the tragic end of unwise interference.

A harsh voice interrupted the train of his thoughts.

"We are ready now, commissioner. Have you read your letter?"

Symes looked up at Gideon.

"Yes," he said. "I've read it."

"Good!" Gideon rubbed his hands briskly together. "But I suppose that its contents were not altogether pleasing to you; you've had your own way so long. Well, I want you to ride with me—Brother Samuel will ride on the tail-board of the wagon and lead your horse. As we ride to your headquarters I will tell you of the great work we are to do together. Yes; I count on your support, not that it will be of any great assistance to me, but because it will be so much more agreeable for you. Ah, yes. Well, then, let us make a start."

He jumped up into the wagon and Symes, as if hypnotized by the man's forceful personality, climbed up beside him.

To the accompaniment of much shouting from Samuel and the cracking of the long whip, the sixteen oxen strained at their yokes, and the clumsy vehicle moved slowly down the dusty roadway leading to the kraal of Melefe.

Symes did not speak, hardly moved but, gazing straight ahead, listened to—yet hardly comprehended—the continuous drone of Gideon's voice. Zari, Tomasi's wound and the promise to visit the kraal of Jhentsi were forgotten. Symes could only think of the calamity which had befallen his district.

And from the rear of the wagon, where sat Brother Samuel, sounded the *rat-a-tat-tat* of the kettle-drum.

THE journey from Tomasi's kraal to Melefe's, where Symes had his headquarters, was a long and tedious one. The pace of the oxen was slow and the winding trail was strewn with boulders.

High noon found them still five or six miles from their destination and, as they halted for a two hour rest, it was sun-down when they came to the group of neat, well-kept huts which formed Symes' quarters.

Native police boys came running to greet them and, in response to terse orders—the tone of which set them staring at each other in bewilderment—outspanned the oxen, and carried certain articles from the wagon into Symes' sleeping hut.

"I'll go and wash now, if you'll excuse me," Symes said wearily after he had seen to the comfort of his guest. "Perhaps Samuel—" the native was sitting in Symes' deck-chair—"had better come with me. I'll make him known to the native police and they'll take care of him."

But Gideon raised his hands in protest.

"No, commissioner. Brother Samuel will share this hut with me—there is room enough for us both, and for you, too, for that matter. I don't like to think of you sleeping in that cheerless place."

Symes, who had previously announced that he would turn the store-hut into sleeping quarters for himself, made hasty excuses.

"Oh, I'll be quite comfortable there—really," he said, and hurried away before Gideon could make an issue of it. "Skoff will be ready in half an hour," he called back over his shoulder.

"*Inkosi*," said the orderly who brought Symes his bath water, "how long will the little red fat man and his grinning ape of a servant stay with us?"

"I do not know. What matter?"

"Matter enough, *inkosi*. The white man is a fool and——"

"And a white man," Symes interrupted sternly.

"True, *inkosi*. The white man does not understand us, but thinks he does," the orderly amended. "And as for the grinning one: He is sitting in the *inkosi's* chair. Is that permitted? *Au-a!* A jackal would defile it less."

"It is but a little thing. Before to-morrow's sun has set you will doubtless hear of——"

He stopped abruptly and then added irritably:

"Get out! You talk too much and—so do I."

When the gong sounded for skoff, Symes was already in the mess hut. Gideon presently joined him and seated himself at the head of the table with pompous dignity. Many fat little men are pompous—their fatness creates for them the illusion of height and good carriage.

"Brother Samuel will be—" he began,

but was interrupted by sounds of combat outside the hut—squeals of pain, a high-pitched, effeminate voice crying for help in English, and then cursing in the vernacular, were punctuated by dull thuds and a deep voice booming:

"*Tula, inja!* Shut up, dog."

The two men rushed to the door of the hut and saw Samuel struggling helplessly in the arms of a brawny native police boy.

"What is this, Marka," Symes asked, with difficulty restraining his desire to laugh.

The police boy released his hold of Samuel who, quick to seize an advantage, kicked the other's shin then, squealing in fear, dodged for safety behind Gideon, babbling excitedly his version of the affair.

Marka, bearing the excruciating pain of the kick with stoical calm, though his eyes looked murderously at Samuel, saluted, stood stiffly to attention and made his report:

"That dog tried to enter the place where you eat, *inkosi*, saying that he was going to eat with you. I thought he jested and told him to go to the police huts where there was plenty of food to fill his belly, and enough beer to make him think himself a man. But he, laughing at me, said he was as good as any white man and was going to sit at the table with you. He tried to enter—and I stopped him. That is all, *inkosi*. If the fool had been a man, the *inkosi* would not have been disturbed. But no, he must needs cry out like a maiden."

Symes turned to Gideon.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Marka has been a little too zealous, perhaps—but Samuel undoubtedly provoked him greatly."

"You seem to ignore the most important feature of this regrettable incident," Gideon remarked icily. "Why should this policeman think it strange that Brother Samuel should eat with us? Come—" he took Samuel by the arm—"we will go in together."

Symes looked after them in amazement until he was conscious that Marka was standing beside him, gaping open-mouthed. Then he snorted with disgust and entering the hut sat down at the table.

The meal was a silent one save for the occasional low-toned remarks of Gideon's which Samuel greeted with half-suppressed titters.

Both his guests ate heartily but Symes, though he had not broken his fast—save for the cup of coffee at Zari's—since yesternight, only toyed with his food.

He felt nauseated. Not because he was forced to sit at the same table with a native; his friendship for Zari and many warriors of the district gave the lie to that. It was rather that the situation was a forecast of what was to come. Symes did not believe in the equality of white and black any more than he believed a child is the equal of a man. But children grow up and, with the passing of centuries, the Bantu race will grow up. Symes considered it his duty to see that their instruction was not too rapid or wrongfully directed.

In the same way that wise parents demand and receive respect from their children, so Symes demanded respect from the natives of his district and hedged himself about with certain restrictions. Children can be so easily spoiled!

The meal over, they adjourned to the office hut, Gideon having expressed a desire to see a map of the district. For a while they talked of hunting, the little man proving that he could, on occasion, be a very good listener.

After a while, however, there came a pause. It was broken by Symes who, blowing a smoke screen between himself and Gideon, said—

"Do you mind telling me again just what you propose to do in my district?'

Gideon smiled triumphantly at the native who, perched on the edge of the desk, was admiring the pattern of his bright hued socks.

"I told Brother Samuel that you had not heard what I was saying as we rode on the wagon this morning."

"I'm sorry," Symes apologized. "I was very tired—I had not slept last night——"

"Well! I'll tell you again. Shall I?"

He appealed to Samuel who giggled as he answered:

"Yes: Tell him unless you're afraid he'll go to sleep again. Shall I get the drum? That will keep him awake."

Symes looked up at him quickly and noticed for the first time that many of his teeth were gold-filled. Immediately he understood something which had been puzzling him since the morning; something about the man's accent.

"You were educated in America," he exclaimed suddenly and ignoring Samuel's excited confirmation of the statement said to Gideon: "There is nothing quite so insanely cruel as to take a native boy from a kraal, educate him abroad and then bring him back to his own country. It never works. This boy is a misfit. His own people won't recognize him—besides, he thinks he's too good for them—and white men *can't* recognize him, except——"

He hesitated. He had been on the point of saying—

"Except misguided fools like you."

Gideon's eyes glinted coldly.

"Go on," he said. "Except?"

"I've forgotten what I was going to say—" Symes' evasion was very weak—"but it never works. Might as well expect a hot-house plant to flourish after it has been transplanted into an unsheltered, barren field."

"That's a subject for debate," Gideon said slowly. "I think you're wrong, terribly wrong. But never mind that now. You want to hear about my plans; they are infinitely more important." His eyes glowed fanatically. "Well, then, I'm going to make this district a Blue Ribbon District."

He paused impressively.

"A Blue Ribbon District," Symes echoed. "I don't think I quite understand."

Gibson waved his hands impatiently.

"I'm going to make all these people teetotalers. I'm going to stop this beer-drinking."

"But how?"

"You witnessed a small beginning this morning. That, however, was not wisely done. I had intended first to enlist your cooperation. But you were away, they told me, on a hunting trip and when Brother Samuel told me that preparations were on foot for a beer-drink, the opportunity seemed too good to miss."

"That beer-drink was being arranged in your honor," Symes said caustically. "You were their guest; you had accepted their hospitality."

"True—but the end justifies everything."

"What is the end?"

"A sober district," Gideon said with portentous gravity.

"But it is sober," Symes protested. "Of course every kraal, now that the Government has restricted the power of the chiefs, has its two or three sots but the rest——"

"Nonsense! You are so near to them—and yet not near enough—that you are blind to the real truth. Now, in the short time I have been in the country, I have seen *things!* Brother Samuel has told me of the nameless practises his people indulge in when under the influence of beer: Vile, degrading dances——"

"The dances are symbolical: Our wedding ceremony is degrading according to the creeds of certain faiths, our burial customs even more so."

But Gideon ignored the interruption and continued:

"—knobkerrie fights, gambling and debauchery, all due to their drinking orgies. Remove the cause, the effect will vanish and the natives of the district will have advanced a long way toward the light."

Symes felt as if he were butting his head against a brick wall; yet, though he realized that his cause was hopeless, he was determined to make still further protest.

"Even if all this were true—and it's not," he added to himself—"there are still good reasons why beer-making should not be prohibited."

"Name them."

"Water is scarce, and there's always the danger of the supply becoming contaminated. And they must drink something."

"We'll have to teach them to dig wells and make them boil their water."

"No good digging for water in a country where there are no springs; and before we can teach them to boil their drinking water they'll die of typhoid or enteric or something."

"Any other objections," Gideon said impatiently and glanced at his watch.

"Yes. The beer has strong medicinal properties. It is a powerful laxative and, where there's no beer, there's scurvy."

"Then we'll teach them to grow green stuffs; we'll dose them with croton oil. Your objections are childish."

"Maybe. But I know my people and I know this country. However—" he shrugged his shoulders in helpless resignation—"I suppose it's impossible to persuade you."

"Quite. And I take it you are prepared to support me?"

"How?"

"By accompanying me, with an escort of native police, to the various kraals of the district, thus making sure that there will be no possible chance of the natives misunderstanding the fact that my orders are official.

I shall also expect you to enforce my orders. We will start with Melefe's kraal in the morning."

"Very good," Symes agreed dully. "But tell me the meaning of the flag and the drums."

"The flag is my own conception," Gideon said proudly. "Blood and fire. It is symbolical. The blood will be shed of any who dare to oppose me; the beer gourds, and all the vessels they use in the brewing, I will burn. And so, by blood and fire, I will save these people from their sins and lead them out of the way of darkness.

"The drums? They are Samuel's contribution—he knows his people—and they have proved most potent. As the drums beat—so are the passions of the people swayed.

"And now, I'll bid you good night."

He rose and strutted pompously out of the hut and Samuel, a little less confident, Symes thought, followed closely behind.

Far into the night Symes sat at his desk, puzzling over the situation which confronted him. Plans suggested themselves to him but they were, he finally decided, all worthless. He might succeed in deceiving Gideon for a little while, but the deception would mean his removal and the evil would have only been postponed.

Better then that he act on the Chief Native Commissioner's suggestion: To assist Gideon, rather than put obstacles in his path, so that he could accomplish his mission much sooner and be ready to move on to new fields.

On this Symes had almost decided, then a scrap of conversation which had registered on his subconscious flashed through his mind.

"And when we have put an end to beer drinking," Gideon had said, "we will make it illegal to have more than one wife."

Symes thought now of the momba he had killed, and of Zari.

Unlocking one of the drawers of his desk he opened it and took from it two twigs, tightly bound together.

Then he left the hut, walking noiselessly for all his big bulk, and made his way to the hut of the native police sergeant.

* * *

IT MAY have been pure chance that a gray lourie—the noisiest bird of the bush—should have perched on the roof of Zari's hut just at sunrise the following morning and have screamed its raucous "Go-away," with much ado of raising and lowering its crest. Undoubtedly it was that which awakened Zari; but just what impelled him to rise, when normally he would have turned over and found sleep again, is hard to say; neither is there any apparent reason for the fact that Zari's first act was to get out the telescope Symes had given him and focus it on the trail leading to Tomasi's kraal.

For ten minutes or more he gazed intently through the telescope, shifting the focus occasionally. Then, with a low chuckle, he closed the instrument, replaced it in its case and, curling up on his blankets, fell instantly asleep.

When he awoke again the sun had traveled far and, sitting on the floor of his hut, gazing at him fearfully, was a powerful warrior.

"It would seem that you dare much," Zari said. "Your need must be great that you venture to enter my hut while my spirit is holding conferences with the Great Ones."

"Aye, Zari," the man said falteringly. "My need is great—but not for myself would I have dared this. I come for Tomasi and his people; aye, it may be for the people of all this land—it may be that I have come to warn you."

He looked about him uneasily.

"Has the matter to do with the beating of a drum?"

"*Au-a!*" the man exclaimed, startled. "Do you know that Great One?"

"Fool! Is not everything known to me? If I did not watch over you—how long would life be left in you, or in the bodies of any of the warriors of this land? I am everywhere: The wind is my ears, the dust of the ground my eyes. Where then can you go to tell secrets that I should not hear? When you stopped by the dead marula-tree to take a thorn from your foot, did you think of me?"

"*Au-a, baba!*" the man breathed softly.

"No, you did not think of me. Yet it was Zari who caused the thorn to fall in your way. Aye, I knew you were hungry. So I made you stop close to where was a bee's nest. Did you eat well?"

"*Au-a.* Wise one! This is the greatest of all magic."

"It is nothing—less than nothing," Zari said peevishly. "Yet do not forget how constant is my thought for you and all the people of Melefe. But how now? Did you come to gaze at me like a love-sick calf? I am no foolish maiden to be won by sighs and mournful glances."

"What need to tell, O Lord of Life and Death, the story of Tomasi's shame. It is already known to you."

"Undoubtedly, fool. Yet tell of it and so relieve yourself of a burden too great for you to bear. When a man is sick, if he vomits the bile, health will return to him; should a man be shamed—let him tell of it to me, and the shame is removed."

So, without further delay, the warrior told of the happenings at the kraal; of the spilling of the beer, the burning of the gourds, the anger of the warriors and the arrival of Symes.

Zari made no comment during the unfolding of the tale but sat with his eyes closed, his legs crossed, rocking slowly backward and forward.

"And you say," he questioned when the warrior had finished, "that *Incubu* forgot his promise to Tomasi and rode away with this strange *umlungu?*"

"Yah, wise one."

"Then *Incubu* is no true man—he is a liar and a fool."

The man was worried, greatly worried. Zari had given him proof of his fearful power, yet the warrior dared to contradict him.

"Not so, wise one," he said bluntly. "*Incubu* is our friend in all things. But—" he hesitated—"I think the drums have bewitched him."

Zari's eyes gleamed approvingly.

"Then what would you have me do?"

"Make us a charm, O wise one, that will make *Incubu* deaf to the sound of the drums."

"That might well be," Zari mused. "There were two drummers, you say?"

"Aye. One an *umlungu*, the other a black dog who apes the way of the whites."

"Aye, it may well be," Zari repeated thoughtfully. "But better, perhaps, to silence the drummers. I could plant a branch broken from a mapani bush into the ground and, as the branch withered, so would these drum beaters sicken and die."

"Truly," the warrior whispered. "It has been done."

He shivered as if a cold wind were blowing upon him.

"But that can not be," Zari continued. "Therefore I will find another way when the time comes.

"But the time is not yet. Tell Tomasi that. Now go—I have much to do."

The warrior jumped to his feet, eager to tell of his experiences to his companions at the kraal; glad to be dismissed from the presence of the mighty Zari.

It was noon when Sergeant Bomba of the Native Police arrived at Zari's hut, and him the witch doctor had watched through the telescope for two hours or more.

And so, although the sergeant professed to be scornful of Zari's reputation of possessing supernatural powers, he was faced with proof which could not be denied; for how else, save by magic, could Zari have known that he had turned from the trail at such and such a place; had rested here, had there aimed his old-fashioned carbine—pretending he was a great hunter—at a buck; how else could Zari have known about the *intombi** who stopped him by the rocks and with whom he had wasted much time in fruitless banter?

So the sergeant forgot his determination to hand the twigs to Zari and depart hurriedly. Instead he became a willing informer, over-willing, indeed, so that Zari had occasion to question him closely in order to separate the truth from the figments of Bomba's lively imagination.

For the next three days Zari remained close to his telescope and each of his visitors—there were seven in all—had demonstrated to him the fact that Zari did not lie when he said, "All things are known to me," and each one gave him some fresh line of information concerning the "strangers of the drums." So that by taking the sum of his knowledge, Zari had a very accurate idea of the white man's mission, of its progress and of the way in which Symes and the people reacted to it.

But chiefly he was concerned, it would seem, in the welfare of Samuel, and when the messenger from the last kraal to be visited by the "Red Destroyer," had made his report Zari chuckled and that night the *tat-tat-a, tat-tat-a* of the kettle-drum and the *boom, boom, boom* of the bass drum lost caste; sounded like the puny efforts of a child.

For that night Zari's drum bellowed and coughed; and as its mighty voice roared over the veld women looked at each other in anxious fear—they could not read the code—men smiled knowingly and children sobbed themselves to sleep. And one Samuel, who that day had made himself particularly obnoxious by reason of his overweening conceit, so that even David Gideon reproved him, *he* turned a sickly gray color and insisted that Gideon keep awake all night to protect him from some imaginary terror.

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* Maiden of marriageable age.

GIDEON'S first move of the campaign to convert the people of Melefe's district to his doctrine of sobriety had much of a comic opera element about it, and Symes found it almost possible to laugh; but not quite. One doesn't laugh at the funeral of a friend.

Shortly after sunrise the party left Symes' headquarters and marched up to Melefe's kraal.

First walked a native police boy carrying the yellow and crimson flag, then Brother Samuel, beating a tattoo on his kettle-drum. With him was Gideon, carrying a drum almost as big as himself, which he pounded with great enthusiasm. Symes, at the head of his native police—fifty of them—brought up the rear.

Seven times they marched round the outside of the kraal—just as, Gideon was careful to explain, the children of Israel marched round the walls of Jericho—then they defiled through the gate in the stockade and made straight for the large cattle-*scherm** in the center of the kraal.

There the drummers increased their efforts until the din was deafening.

In a very short time the place was filled with people, nodding their heads and stamping their feet in time to the drum-beats.

Then, suddenly, the drummers ceased their efforts and Gideon addressed the multitude—Samuel acting as his interpreter.

Gideon was a fiery orator and the people listened to him with something akin to awe. His violent gestures and facial contortions fascinated them; but it is doubtful if they heard Samuel's clumsy translation and it is quite sure that they did not understand, for when, having reached the end of his harangue, Gideon ordered them to bring all the beer-pots and set them before him, and that a big fire should be lighted, they obeyed him without question, thinking that all that had gone before was but the preliminary to a big beer-drink.

While some of the women were bringing the beer-pots and others building a fire, the drumming recommenced and the warriors of the kraal improvised songs to the rhythm of the beat.

But some among the older men, Melefe and his gray-bearded councilors, having understood what Gideon intended, came to Symes.

"Is this true, *inkosi?* Will the 'Red Head' do this mad thing?"

"It is true, Melefe," Symes said in a low voice.

Melefe looked at him in amazement, his eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"The *inkosi* jokes," he said heavily.

"No. All will be done as Red Head says."

"The beer spilled? The gourds destroyed?"

"Yes!"

"I say, 'No.'"

Melefe beat his hands against his mighty thighs and the sound of the impact was like a rifle shot.

"I will now tell my people——"

"You must not, Melefe," Symes interrupted.

"Must not? Who says, 'Must not,' to Melefe?"

"I do."

The two men exchanged sharp, challenging glances.

Then Melefe said:

"You have always been our friend, *inkosi*, and when at other times you have crossed my will I have stood on one side. But this, this cannot be."

"The Red Head has given an order—he will see to it that it is enforced."

"And if I stand against him—what then?"

"Then you stand against me and these."

Symes indicated the native police with a wave of his arm.

"I hold you and them in the hollow of my palm," said Melefe with a harsh laugh, opening and shutting his hands spasmodically, and was silent for a while.

Then he asked suddenly—

"Is Red Head to stay with us always?"

"No," Symes answered. "When he has worked his will, he will go away."

"Ah," Melefe said softly in relieved tones. "That is better—yet bad enough.

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* Corral.

He is like a rogue elephant, pulling up everything, destroying more than he can eat. But the rogue, driven by his madness, moves on; he cannot stay in one place, and after the season's rains there is nothing to show that he has passed by."

"Then you will not oppose Red Head? All that he orders shall be performed?"

"I will not oppose him," Melefe said slowly. "For the rest, I cannot say. At least there shall be no blood-letting in my kraal. Red Head will go soon, you say?"

Symes nodded. He was content that the present crisis had been avoided and, after all, perhaps Gideon would leave when this task was finished.

"Good!" Melefe grunted. "Remember what I do today, *inkosi*, in times to come."

"I will not forget," Symes replied. "The taxes will not be heavy this year, I think. But look!"

The drumming had suddenly ceased. Before Gideon, arranged about the flag bearer, were gourds of all shapes and sizes—all filled with the thick, biscuit-colored beer of the country.

To the right of the flag a big fire blazed fiercely.

Gideon, his face flushed with excitement, was examining the gourds, running from one end of the row to the other.

The people watched him in silence, thinking he was about to perform a great wonder-working: Had not the black dog, his voice, said that better than beer would be given to them. And how were they to know that he meant water?

At a command from Symes the native police now took up a new position, arranging themselves about the flag, facing the people. Melefe and several of his councilors were with Symes, at the right of the files of police.

"Tell me," Gideon asked through Samuel's mouth, "are all the gourds here? Is there no more beer in the kraal?"

"Nay," the people answered in a mighty shout. "All is before you, Red Head."

"Tell the fat one to make haste with his magic," called a warrior, "for we are very thirsty."

Gideon smiled as Samuel translated this to him, then moved swiftly down the line of gourds, kicking them over, one after another; Samuel following closely behind him, picking up the empty gourds and throwing them upon the fire.

At first the people did not comprehend the meaning of it. Then, with a menacing roar they moved threateningly forward—slowly, terribly.

"Stop," shouted Symes and his voice sounded clearly above their low-voiced, animal-like growls.

At the voice of the man who had been their advisor and friend for so many years, they halted, greatly bewildered. Then came on again—slowly but irresistibly. It frightened Symes: He had expected a wild rush as soon as the people had fully comprehended Gideon's move. He was prepared to meet that—but this, this terrible, menacing slowness! As well attempt to stem a glacier!

He shouted an order and the police brought their rifles up to their shoulders. They carried only blank cartridges but the bluff had worked before. Now, it seemed that the people were entirely unconscious of the police boys' presence.

And all the while Gideon, intent only on the work he had set himself, kicked over pot after pot of beer.

"Stop!" Melefe's big voice boomed menacingly. "This thing will be seen through to the end. I have spoken; it is an order."

The advance was checked. Something greater than their fear of the police boys' firearms, greater than their respect and admiration for Symes had spoken.

Melefe's order was supported by all the autocratic rulers of his people's history and they did not move again, save to sway forward from the waist. As in Chaka's time big *impis* had turned their spears upon each other to satisfy that bloody ruler's whim, so now they stood and watched this terrible destruction—in silence—because the chief had spoken.

It was nearly finished, now. The hard, sun-baked ground was covered with a creamy foam, a lava-like flood which flowed slowly down the slight rise on which Gideon stood toward the people. It washed against the feet of those in the front ranks and the dogs lapped noisily.

The fire burned less brightly; the flames gave place to a dense cloud of smoke which drifted lazily, pall-like, above the heads of the people.

It was all over. The last gourd had been committed to the flames.

With a triumphant air Gideon turned to Symes, his eyes gleamed with a strange light.

"All is well," he screamed in a cracked

hysterical voice. "I have saved these people from a great sin. Now let us go—rejoicing."

He picked up his drum and beat a pæan of praise and glory. Symes, at that moment, wanted to strangle him.

And so they marched away from the kraal, the flag flying before them; Gideon triumphant, Symes greatly disturbed.

Behind them sounded the sullen murmurs of the people. But above the murmur, above the beating of Gideon's drum, men heard the insulting *ra-tat-a-tat-tat* of Samuel's drumming.

* * *

SYMES passed the next few days as a man in a stupor. Everything he did, he did mechanically. With his native police he escorted Gideon to kraal after kraal and was forced to stand by while that man carried out his fanatical purpose. And Gideon did more than destroy gourds and spill beer upon the ground. He destroyed a people's faith in the white man's justice and sense of fair play.

Yet Symes found much to admire in Gideon; it was impossible to deny the fat little man's indomitable courage and fighting spirit. He would not rest, he seemed to be driven by some compelling urge. Neither would he give up the ceremony of the drumming or, once in sight of a new kraal to be converted, allow any one to bear the drum for him. And so, carrying the ponderous thing, he marched for many weary miles in the blazing heat of the African sun; went on when Symes, hardened campaigner as he was, desired rest.

Once the commissioner, noticing how ill the man looked at times of relaxation, remonstrated with him, urging him to rest for several days before tackling a new kraal.

"I am not tired," Gideon had replied. "I can not rest until I have visited every kraal in the district."

Symes gave up after that: He realized that further protestation would be useless.

As for Samuel: That man became more insufferable with each passing day. He seemed to take great delight in insulting the people of the kraals. Basking in the glory of Gideon's absolute authority, he took that authority to himself. All the natives hated him—specially the native police, whom he continually referred to as, "the black slave-dogs of the white fool, Symes." As for the people of the kraals, so greatly did they resent his words and actions, they would have torn him limb from limb had not Symes surrounded him with a bodyguard of police. And it was well for Samuel that Symes' discipline had a greater hold over the police than their hatred toward Samuel.

It was at Marfwe's kraal that matters respecting Samuel reached a climax.

Gideon had insisted that Symes should not accompany him. He was resolved to go unattended save by Samuel and one police boy to carry the flag. Gideon believed that his success had been due entirely to his own forceful personality, courage and the righteousness of his cause. He had already visited six kraals with Symes and had met no opposition. So he laughed at Symes' fears—forgetting his experience at Tomasi's kraal; forgetting that Melefe had ordered that Red Head should be obeyed and forbidding bloodshed.

Marfwe's kraal was a very small one, mustering, at the most, no more than twenty men of fighting age, so Symes gave in to Gideon's request. He was influenced somewhat by the fact that they were not far now from Zari's hut and he hoped for a visit from the witch doctor. Zari's failure to answer the appeal for help had been one of Symes' greatest worries during these days of trial; not so much, perhaps, that help was not forthcoming, but that Zari had apparently deserted him.

So he watched Gideon, attended only by Samuel and the flag-bearer, go up to the kraal; watched them encircle it seven times and then pass through the gate of the stockade.

For a little while the drums sounded—then silence.

Then after a long while Symes heard a confused murmur. Gradually the murmur took form and he heard angry shouts of:

"*Bulala!* Kill!"

The native police were down at the waterhole, bathing, and first firing his revolver to rally them Symes ran at full speed to the kraal.

There, in a clearing before the headman's hut, the men of the kraal, brandishing knobkerries and yelling fierce threats, were closing in on Gideon and his two companions.

Gideon was swinging his drumstick menacingly; his face was white but there was no indication of fear in his eyes. The police boy was standing beside him while behind them, crouched on hands and knees, gibbering with fright, was Samuel.

As Symes came to the clearing a native in the front rank struck at Gideon's head with his knobkerry.

The police boy warded off the blow with the flag-staff which snapped in two, leaving him a less cumbersome weapon, and Gideon brought the knobbed end of his drum-stick on his opponent's head with a dull thud.

Then the fighting really commenced, the people of the kraal struggling against each other in their eagerness to close in on Gideon and the policeman—though it was evident that their anger was really directed against Samuel.

The flag-bearer struck right and left with his weapon and Gideon's arm rose and fell with the same regularity as if he were beating the drum.

All this Symes saw in the brief moment he hesitated before plunging into the fray.

Symes used no weapon, he needed none save his fists, but went through the attackers with the force of a battering ram, and they gave way before him. No man struck at him, only one man raised his knobkerry to do so and he lowered it and asked pardon as soon as he recognized Symes.

Two men in his path were fighting each other, forgetting their original aim in the heat of the fight. Symes picked up one as easily as if he had been a child, and threw him at the other and both went down in a tangled heap. The other men of the kraal laughed and Symes sighed with relief. He knew that the serious phase of the situation was over—for the present at any rate—without any great damage. A few of the kraal people would have violent headaches for a day or two, and smarting ribs; blood ran down from a cut in Gideon's forehead, and the flag-bearer's left arm hung down helplessly.

It was to the police boy that Symes gave first heed. With his firm, capable hands he set the broken bone—using the flag-staff for splints, the flag for a bandage. This gave him great satisfaction.

"You had better come back to the camp," he said to Gideon, after he had examined that man's cut, relieved at finding it only a superficial wound. "You've done enough today."

But Gideon, snorting wrathfully, shook his head.

"I have struck a few good blows for the right today," he said. "I have put my hands to the plow: I shall not turn back."

Symes shrugged his shoulders and after directing the police, who had meanwhile arrived on the scene, to surround the people of the kraal, watched while Gideon concluded his ceremonies; watched him change the dry dust of the veld to beer-smelling mud; watched the burning of the empty gourds.

When all was finished and they had marched back to their camp Symes asked the flag-bearer the cause of the trouble.

"That dog, Red Head's servant, called them many evil names, *inkosi*. He spat upon them with words. He put them to the great shame—not once, but many times. Had you not given him into my protection I would have killed him myself."

When Symes took the matter up with Gideon and Samuel the latter answered impudently:

"The police boy is a liar and—" he turned to Gideon—"you are a fool if you believe the commissioner. He is trying to turn you against me, so that he can interpret for you and spoil all your plans. He——"

"That is enough, Brother Samuel," Gideon said sternly. No one could know Symes and not realize the man's great worth. "That is enough. I have thought lately that you are becoming puffed up with pride, taking the glory of this thing we do all to yourself. I have noticed, too, how contemptuously you treat these fellow countrymen of yours. You seem to think you are too good for them. But, 'pon my word, I believe they are better than you—for all your training. At least they're courteous—and brave. I warn you now: If I have any more complaints, if I suspect you again of acting in a way that will endanger our mission, I—er—I shall punish you very severely."

That night Zari spoke to all his people, and the sound of his voice made the ground tremble underfoot. All through the night the drum spoke, and there is nothing on earth quite like the voice of Zari's signal drum. Now it was like the hacking coughs of a lion on the hunt; now it spoke the language of a rogue elephant, changing swiftly to a "roll" of a thousand spear heads beating on a thousand shields.

Samuel was terrified. Civilization had taught him much, but it had not taught him to forget the menace of the drums. He beat furiously upon his kettle-drum, striving to drown the awful clamor of Zari's—but it was a vain attempt. He tried to stop up his ears—but that was useless.

And so he kept watch the long night through, huddling close to Gideon, surrounded by awful fantasies conjured up by his imagination.

GIDEON looked very pale and tired the next morning; he had been awake all night endeavoring to calm the fears of Samuel. Yet he would not rest but ordered Symes to break camp at once.

"There are three kraals, you say, a twenty-mile trek from here. That is good. This shall be a Red Letter day—we will go to them all before sunset."

So the oxen were inspanned and the march began—Symes riding ahead on his horse, Samuel and Gideon in the wagon, the police marching in the rear.

Several times during the long tedious hours of the trek Gideon tried to cheer Samuel by beating on the drum, but the man became so hysterical that he finally left him to himself. He was, as matter of fact, rather disgusted with Samuel, who seemed to have changed radically during the night. Gideon spoke of this to Symes at the mid-day halt.

"Don't you think Samuel's changed?" he asked.

"In what way?"

"He didn't shave this morning, he hasn't put on his socks or shoes yet and he used his finger for a tooth-brush. Then, too, his speech seems to have thickened and he doesn't seem to be at ease in my presence. Do you think that I treated him too harshly yesterday?"

Symes laughed.

"No. He's finding himself, that's all. I think the drum last night helped him to remember a lot of things he has been trying to forget. Perhaps his terror of the night was a throw-back to some fears of childhood. I prefer him this way. He talked a great deal before, you know."

Gideon nodded.

"I talk a great deal myself," he said wistfully.

But if Zari's drumming created a feeling of depression in Gideon and Samuel, it had just the opposite effect on Symes and the native police. Symes became quite cheerful—confident now that Zari was answering his appeal for help—how he did not know. He found out, however, before the setting of the sun; found out that Zari had enlisted the most powerful thing in the world in his aid.

At each of the three kraals they visited that day, this is what happened:

Gideon went through his usual preliminaries—the marching around the outside of the kraal, the drumming and the "talk." Then, when he ordered the pots of beer to be brought out the warriors had passed before him in single file, and each man carried a gourd of beer in his hands. This, just before he came to where Gideon was standing, he turned upside down and threw the empty gourd on the fire which had been lighted near by. Then, laughing uproariously, he had passed on to make room for the man behind him.

"You should be very happy," Symes commented as they were sitting around their camp fire, eating the evening meal. "They have come to see things your way—your work is done."

Gideon did not answer. His attitude was that of a child whose favorite toy has been taken away from him.

But Samuel said hurriedly:

"Yes—let us go. We have done all that we came to do. I shall——"

His voice ended in a terrified shriek as an assegai flashed through the air and quivered in the ground at his feet.

A search was instantly made for the thrower of the spear, without result, though Bomba, the native sergeant, carefully—but not obviously—avoided a certain clump of bush.

That night Zari again spoke to his people and, when the wind was right, Samuel heard the distant rumble of his drum. It was enough; it snapped the last vestige of restraint and Samuel was suddenly conscious that the white man smell was distasteful to him.

When the camp was asleep Samuel arose quietly, untied Symes' horse from its picket rope, led it carefully past the ranks of the sleeping policeman—the sentries slept, too, or preferred to look in another direction—then mounted and rode swiftly away. In his pocket were Gideon's gold watch and well-filled purse.

"He won't go far," Symes assured Gideon when Samuel's flight was known. "Everybody knows my horse. We'll have him back for you in two or three days. In the meantime I'll interpret for you."

Gideon nodded.

"I'm not sure," he said gloomily, "that I want him back—except to punish him for stealing. He was the weak link in my chain. Poor boy. He is surely a misfit. What's he fitted for? Is he entirely spoiled? I remember you saying something, the first day we met, about men like Samuel. I thought you were prejudiced then. Is there no hope for him?"

"If he can get away from this country—yes; or if he can forget all that he has learned from the white men and try to be worthy of his own race."

Gideon rose wearily.

"Let us make a start," he said. "It is a big kraal we go to next?"

"The biggest in the district, after Melefe's."

Gideon's face lighted up instantly and he thumped the big drum with some of his old-time vigor. Then, turning to Symes, he asked pathetically—

"Don't you know how to play a kettle-drum?"

When Symes answered, "No," he became morose and dejected and did not speak again until the bullock-wagon came to a halt outside a large kraal. Then, in the best of good spirits, he made ready for his attack.

But he was not given a chance to launch it. Before the oxen could be outspanned a seemingly endless procession of men and women came from the kraal, laughing and singing happily; and each one carried a gourd full of beer.

As if at some prearranged signal they halted not ten paces from the wagon, raised their gourds high above their heads and dashed them with great force to the ground.

And they laughed continuously; it was tremendous and painfully nerve-racking; its effect was hypnotic.

The native police unable to control themselves, added their guffaws to the volume of sound. The muscles of Symes' face twitched spasmodically, his mouth gaped wide and then he, too, burst into peal after peal of uncontrollable laughter.

Gideon was the only man not affected. His face went purple, then a livid white, with rage. He opened his mouth to speak but the words would not come. He beat furiously on the drum—but to no avail.

Then, with a fierce, inarticulate cry he struck at Symes with his drum-stick, hitting him on the temple, and followed this up by charging madly into the laughing crowd—striking left and right, crying:

"Stop it, —— you. For God's sake stop it."

Not attempting to strike back, men closed in on him, dodging his frenzied blows, and, after a short struggle, pinioned his arms to his side.

So, still laughing, they brought him to Symes.

"He is a little mad, *inkosi*," they said. "You will bear witness for us, to Melefe. We dealt very gently with this man. We have spilled no blood."

"Aye. I will so bear witness," Symes answered gravely.

Without further speech they returned quietly to their huts—exhausted from much laughing.

The rage had all gone from Gideon now and he looked at Symes very sheepishly.

"I'm sorry, commissioner," he said. "I was a fool."

"You were not responsible," Symes said gently, noting how weak and burned out the man was. "On the top of all that you've done—and you not acclimated yet—that laughter was too much. It was enough to drive any one insane. It affected me too—I wasn't responsible for my laughing—I couldn't help myself. But I wonder why they laughed—why they are acting in this manner?"

"I don't think it matters," Gideon said wearily. "Laughter is a great power, isn't it, commissioner? And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll see if I can get some rest. I'm very tired."

He climbed up into the wagon and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

He did not awaken until the paling of the stars in the east announced the advent of another day. Then he arose and after pacing restlessly up and down for a time, deep in thought, awakened Symes.

"What is it?" that man asked—instantly wide awake.

"I want the oxen inspanned."

"There is no need for us to trek so early," Symes objected. "The next kraal is not over a mile away."

"If I had known how to inspan," Gideon said frigidly, "I would not have disturbed you. I want to start at once."

So Symes gave the necessary orders and when all was ready started to climb up on to the wagon-seat beside Gideon. But that man put out a restraining hand.

"No. I go alone. Good-by, commissioner.

"But you can't go alone," Symes exclaimed, wondering if the man were really mad.

"That is my intention."

"But that's foolish. You know nothing about driving oxen, you don't know the country or the people. You——"

"I shall be able to manage all right."

"You must have an escort of police. I insist on that."

Gideon considered this a moment before answering:

"Very well. But only two."

"You are going to Jonte's kraal?"

Jonte was the headman of the next kraal scheduled to be visited.

"No. To Bulawayo."

Symes could not quite hide his relief.

"Ah! To get another interpreter? Then I'll see you again soon?"

"No—I don't know. Perhaps, after I have learned to laugh, I'll come back. Now I'm ready to go; I want to get away before they come out." He nodded toward the kraal. "If they started to laugh again, I—" his lips trembled—"I don't know what I'd do. Cry like a woman, I think."

Symes climbed up on the seat beside him.

"I'm coming with you," he said, "as far as the ford."

"SAY now, *Incubu*, was it not well done?"

Symes—he was sitting on the high bank of the river watching Gideon's wagon pass slowly out of sight—turned quickly and faced Zari. He showed no surprize but answered the witch doctor's question as if he had been aware of the man's presence all the time.

"Very well done, wise one. But I do not understand many things. What was the message of your drum? I could not read it."

"No white man could read it, *Incubu*. It was the story of my people. It told of all the perils they have known since before time was."

"How then could the man Samuel read it? He left this land when he was but a child and has only just returned."

"Can you tell me, *Incubu*, why all men hate and fear snakes? Why some dread water and others are fearful of great heights? The man knew that the drum spoke of evil things because his forefathers had met those evils. So he was afraid."

"Why then the assegai?"

"Because Samuel thought the drum spoke of evil to come—not of evil past, which would not have frightened him. Therefore the assegai, which he supposed to have been meant for his heart. And so he fled."

"But why work on him, Zari? He was a harmless fool."

"May be, *Incubu*. But many times that fool had aroused the anger of Melefe's people. Therefore I sent him away before he caused them to shed blood. The rest is plain, is it not, *Incubu?* What joy is there in hunting if the beasts walk up to the hunter and impale themselves upon his assegai? How can a man punish when the people punished find joy in it? How can he take pleasure in depriving when the people wish to be deprived? Is it not plain?"

"Truly. Two new things, Zari, have you taught me. That a black man can be defeated through fear; a white man, through laughter. Now let us go, for I am thirsty."

"There is water enough, surely," Zari chuckled.

"True. But my stomach craves beer of your brewing, Zari."

ACCORDING to Watson, Rhodesia's chief native commissioner, the district of Melefe is all that it should be. Watson gives all credit for this to Symes, the resident commissioner. But Symes gives the credit to Zari—Zari, the witch doctor, Zari, his friend.

THE CAMP FIRE

A Meeting Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THIS comrade can give some earnest testimony in our little debate over whether explosives will explode, but it hasn't cooled him any in his liking for adventure:

Detroit, Michigan.

Can no longer resist the temptation of basking in the warmth and good-fellowship of the Camp-Fire. I merely want to squat, light up, and listen in.

DON'T know whether I am qualified or not—never been out of the good ole States—but have seen plenty of them, ranched in the Dakotas, built levees in Texas, worked the hotels from New York to Frisco and now pounding pills. Dare say you all need a druggist in your circle. Always had more or less of an itching to pick up my pen and let you know what I think of your, or rather let me say our, magazine which I have read for the past seven years or more, with the exception of a few months that I lost, due to a mixup (that left me with only one-half of an optic, the other being a good grade of china) with some of Brother Mundy's high explosives. Having been in the drug business for several years, I have had some advantage over the laymen by always getting my issue hot off the press.

Let me add that I am at Camp-Fire's service if ever in need of a druggist or chemist and appreciate being a member of Camp-Fire. Here's to *Adventure!*—GEORGE A. MILLER.

A WORD from Michael J. Phillips concerning his article in this issue:

Santa Barbara, California

The story of Jack Powers as here set down is, I believe, historically correct. The facts which have been woven into it were secured from old people who were children when Jack Powers dominated the

State, from the writings of his contemporaries, and from written reminiscences of survivors.

There are, however, two legends as to his disappearance. One has it that he escaped on a sailing-ship off the coast of Baja California; the other, more generally credited, is the one here set down. I have selected it because it was told me so circumstantially; and also because, as a climax, it is peculiarly appropriate to so wicked a career.—MICHAEL J. PHILLIPS.

SOMETHING from Arthur O. Friel concerning the facts back of his serial beginning in this issue. Also something about an imposter who has been claiming that he is the author of Mr. Friel's stories:

This is the story of *José Martinez* (whom most of you will remember) and of how he made out in No Man's Land.

LIKELY as not, some of you fellows will say the tale is plausible except for the priestess of Platzo, and that no woman could possibly go rambling around head-hunter land performing priestly offices. As a matter of fact, she is about the truest thing in the story. Some twenty-five years ago there was a girl who roved in the Morona section, doing baptisms and similar ceremonies among Indians who would have killed a male priest on sight. She was captured and carried away to slavery more than once by raiding head-hunters, but escaped each time. What eventually became of her only the jungle gods know. She may be still alive and going strong, as she was less than twenty years old at that time and was regarded with a superstitious respect by most of the wilderness people.

This girl was a light Indian of exceptional intelligence, but not white. However, it is a well-known fact that the head-shrinkers (particularly the Huambizas) have for centuries raided the Spanish towns round about and carried away white or near-white women and children for "adoption;" and they're still doing it. Sevilla de Oro was destroyed by them. Borja has been destroyed more than once. Barrancas has been raided repeatedly. And so it goes.

THE massacre of the Peruvian outpost near the Morona in 1913 took place exactly as described by *Lieutenant Manuel Montez*. It was reestablished; but whether it still exists I don't know. Chances are that the Huambizas have wiped it out again. If they haven't, it's not because they lack the inclination.

As for "No Man's Land", it's just that. The whole territory between the Andes, the Amazon and the Rio Yapura (to the Brazilian border) is in dispute between Peru and Ecuador and actually controlled by nobody.

SO MUCH for the story. Now you fellows will pardon me, I hope, if I put before this meeting a little personal matter which may be of some interest to you. I dislike to drag a skunk up to the Camp-Fire, but this critter has been sneaking around our *Adventure* circle so long that it's time to show him up. Like this:

For the past two years a man (?) has been going around claiming to be the author of my stories. His yarn is that the name "Arthur O. Friel" is merely a nom de plume under which he writes. His own name—that is, the one he has been using—is a Scotch name beginning with "Mac" and prefixed by the title "Captain." According to letters in my possession, he inveigled a young woman of a mid-Western State into marrying him, largely on the strength of his claim to the authorship of my stories; then took her South and posed as a veteran of the French and American armies who was out of luck and had a dependent wife about to become a mother; got some money out of the American Legion and tried to get more from other sources on the same plea; was then investigated by the Legion and found to be a crook, who had never served in any army; was convicted of obtaining money on false pretenses, served a term working on county roads, and now has dropped out of sight. At last reports he was still claiming to be the author of my stuff. I have in my possession a letter in his own handwriting in which he claims to be the author of eighteen of my stories in *Adventure*.

I'm getting rather tired of having this polecat represent himself as "Arthur O. Friel." So let me say here and now that this fake "Captain" and fake soldier—and, probably, fake Scotchman—is also a fake Friel. Let me add that the name under which I write is my own name and not a nom de plume. And in case any stranger using my name in any way tries to panhandle you, or to propose marriage—or anything else—to your sister or daughter, I'll take it as a personal favor if you'll beat him up so thoroughly that he will have to be carried away. I shall be pleased to do that same thing myself if I ever meet up with him.

That's all. Now go on with the story.—ARTHUR O. FRIEL.

AS IN many other cases the writer of the following is justified in not wanting his name published—in this case because he is now in public office. I hope, though, that every comrade who speaks at our Camp-Fire will, in cases of doubt, strain every point to say his say over his own name.

October 10th, 1923.

While I can not think England would ever be so foolish as to make war on us with Japan as an ally I do think and I know that we are in the most hopeless position as regards national defense that we could possibly get in. We are defenseless.

I am a veteran of the recent war (went through the Argonne) and I know something about what occurred over there. *We Never Did Get Prepared. Our Artillery Was French and Our Aircraft Was French or it Was Rotten.* The battle of the Argonne was fought some time after we declared war, too.

BUT I don't know what to do about it. Too many swelled heads and too many tightwads and too many just plain fools. I guess we will have to be thoroughly butchered and licked and pay a fifty billion dollar indemnity before the "Great American Ass" will learn that the United States can be knocked for a goal the same as Germany, for example.

Henry V. Thornton's letter was good. I have noticed several guns that get to killing men. Out of hundreds they seem to be the ones that do all of the killing. Ten years ago Dr. Murphey was murdered in ——, and the gun that did it was passed through several hands to a killing two years ago. I know another gun that has killed three men in fifteen years and another that killed two men in Kentucky and moved to Idaho to kill its third man. It may be simply coincidence but, well, I buy my guns new, all the time.—M. N. O.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, L. P. B. Armit, a New Guinea comrade, rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Port Moresby,
Territory of Papua,
via Sydney, Australia

Very many thanks for the very cordial welcome to the fellowship of the Camp-Fire, and also for the invitation to address those about the glowing embers. I heartily reciprocate the kindly feeling and sentiment; it is, to me, a very great privilege to address Camp-Fire as a member of the "writers' brigade," for I have often craved such an opportunity without ever dreaming that the honor would some day be mine. Am I pleased? Well. . . I think it's fine!

To all you who sit about the space by the cheerful side of the coals "I tip me lid 'n' bow," for I find myself on my feet before a very kindly audience. And, I may add, a very critical one; for many of you know a great deal more of the regions beyond the Edge and have done things beside which my humble experiences are very small indeed. Still, I will try and tell you about myself—a subject that I'd rather leave alone.

I FIRST opened my eyes on this jolly old World—less than a century ago. And I've kept my peepers open ever since. Lived in Australia until I could walk alone. Accompanied my parents to help pioneer New Guinea away back in 1895. My pater, Captain W. E. Armit, F. R. G. S., F. L. S., had been in New Guinea before, first as leader of the first exploring expedition—sent there by the *Argus* newspaper of Melbourne in 1883—that entered the interior of the great island, and afterward on private exploration journeys. My pater did much pioneering work before his death while Resident Magistrate in charge of the roughest and most savage part of British New Guinea. My mater was one of that very gallant band of women who have done so much to make the rough and savage lands the present peaceful, happy homes of civilized folk. Without the example of these brave and self-sacrificing women, without their cheerful help and courage in the face of the perils and dangers and hardships inseparable to the pioneering days, the work of Empire could not have been so splendidly performed; and so I feel safe in saying that my mater was a real Empire Builder, more so even than those who did the fighting and rough work that were essential before the foundations of peace and settled government could be properly laid. I am very proud to have had such a mother; her memory is a very beautiful one.

New Guinea was a wild and savage land twenty-eight years ago; even now it is not exactly what one would term a health resort or a place where people would come in search of a cure for shattered nerves. In the '90's the island was little known except on the coast, and there only in odd stretches; the map was mostly blank patches of white, with only the most prominent mountains roughly defined. Looking back through the years it makes me marvel how the sturdy old first settlers stuck it out in the face of the dangers that lurked all around them; but, perhaps, they were like the old caretaker who lived in a dynamite factory. This old man reckoned he "liked a gamble with life."

AFTER living with my people in various parts of British New Guinea I heard the call to wander around the coast and through the islands in a pearling-lugger. I had then reached the mature age of eleven. My brother-in-law owned the vessel and took me along to tender him when he went on his daily strolls along the floor of the ocean in search of mother-of-pearl shell—and anything else worth collecting. These were interesting days for a youngster keen to see and hear all that was worth while; nowadays these impressions are being utilized by me to weave stories that, the editors willing, may some day be read by you. Followed a few months in the jungle with my pater collecting wild rubber from the bush tribes, a period that gives me many memories of wet, miserable days in the teeming rain, flooded rivers, crocodiles, and other unpleasant things. Then came some more fascinating days with my brother-in-law and his pearling outfit. On one of these trips we got mixed up with a gold salving contract. Some miners returning from a goldfield on the northeast coast had dropped several bags of gold overboard when a heavy squall sent their tiny cutter almost keel upward; we were in the vicinity and they appealed to us to come and find their lost dust. We went along and raked the bottom of a strait for several days without result. Then old Lady Luck took a hand—and the first bag was found hanging to the fluke of an anchor! Need I say that within a very few hours the rest of the gold had been located and lifted by my brother-in-law? Yes, we got it all—even to a broken Waterbury watch that one of the miners never knew he had lost! The incidents that occurred during this search make the hackneyed phrase "Truth being stranger" very applicable to New Guinea; for in many other experiences I have seen just as remarkable things occur.

AFTER lifting the gold, we turned our little vessel's nose to the D'Entrecasteaux Group and beyond, to try and locate some rumoured shell-beds that were supposed to be in the vicinity. We got little shell, but we certainly got adventures in liberal quantity. For about this time the world nearly lost a future member of the "writers' brigade," in addition to one good pearler, several "boys," plus a fully equipped lugger. No, it wasn't fire or malaria; it was the effects of misplaced confidence. We anchored in a small bay to load wood and water, and in our innocence remained there for the night. In the wee sma' hours, the local spear-and-stone-club experts tried to stage an impromptu surprize party aboard of our floating home; but we managed to emerge from the rumpus with our hides intact.

Left the pearling fleet after this and took a job in a trading store, where I managed to discover an electric battery that I tried on one of the store "boys" with very disastrous effects to the only shop window in the island. When I opened the gadget that was in the side of the box, the boy straightened out like an arrow and sailed head first through the window—and I left for home! Some more rubber hunting, then a wreck on the coast, several days barefoot tramping along the beaches, and a midnight feed of boiled doughboys and treacle, are the outstanding recollections of these months.

THEN the voice of commerce called again—the manager had forgiven me for his lost window—and I resumed toil at the veteran age of twelve as a full clerk in the same old trading store. Saw lots of amusing and some sad things there, and sold everything in the wide world from teething powders to tombstones plus hooch, anchors, trousers, lumber, axes, jew's-harps, cartridges, and tinned "dog." The manager was a smart salesman and had a stock boast that "If the Angel Gabriel came into the joint we'd pinch his wing-feathers and sell 'em for pipe-cleaners!" This shows how well we had developed the true commercial instinct.

Copra and beche-de-mer buying was a branch of this trade, and I did not like the perfume of these staples, so when chance offered I took a position in the British New Guinea civil service. Worked in various jobs until I got into the magisterial department, when I had the chance of seeing a lot of the *real* New Guinea—the vast interior where only odd people beside the officials and miners ever go. Lived on the goldfields and scaled lots of tall peaks, and gathered lots of impressions and not a few thrills in my wanderings. Had the luck to hold down various districts and divisions as resident magistrate and warden, both on the coast and inland.

THRILLS? A few. Lost half my detachment of constabulary (natives) in a treacherous attack by a local tribe; it was just my good fortune that I was not numbered with the unfortunate constables. A trifle interfered—and I escaped. The trifle was a rusty old steamer with a mail. I stopped to reply to my official letters—and the police were ambushed and murdered only a few hours afterward.

And here I must say a word for the magnificent armed native constabulary of Papua (the colony is known as the Territory of Papua, but is a portion of the island of New Guinea). The force is recruited from the tribes that are under control by the Government; and in all my years of work in charge of various detachments of this force I never found them wanting in pluck, endurance and whole-hearted efficiency. They are the force that has civilized the Australian part of the great island; and when the real history of Papua is written it will be a very thrilling page that chronicles the work and doings of this peerless force.

HAVE done much patrolling in neck-deep sago swamps, clambered through the porridge-pots of the mangrove morasses, shivered with the cold of the tall peaks, and sweated in the furnace heat of the grass plains. The scenic beauties of the Roof of Papua have made me wonder and long for a white companion to share the witchery of rocks and water and forest. For months at a time I have lived without a white mate in the jungle, once for nearly eight months but always I found something of interest in the primitive peoples and wild life about me.

The writing bug came and bit me in these lonely days. The urge to write what I saw all around me was too strong, so I found the little old pen was a great help to fill in the hours after the lamps were lit. And thus "A Stone Age Vendetta" was written. In writing it I have endeavored to follow literally the words used by the old cannibal who narrated it to me; it is practically all facts, and throws a light on the savage life that still stamps about in the dark interior of New Guinea. There is nothing exaggerated or incorrect in the story. The horrible custom of breaking the "meat's" legs to keep it fresh for a considerable period still flourishes in the interior of the Dutch portion of the island; and the ghoulish practise of decorating houses with skulls is in full blast anywhere west and north of the headwaters of the Fly and Kaiserin Augusta Rivers. Other customs touched on still continue, for the old bad ideas die hard; the modern Neolithic Man is nothing if not conservative in his beliefs.

With cordial wishes and kind regards.—L. P. B. ARMIT.

IT SORT of looks to a non-partizan observer like me as if Bill Adams and the other advocates of the greater glory of "wooden ships and iron men" would have to breathe themselves a bit after the following arguments before coming back to make the next round their own. It's John Webb, who has a sea story in this issue, who's talking:

Brooklyn, New York

It is impossible to separate the words, Adventure, Romance, the Sea—in a way they have become synonyms; but people seem to agree that, while this was once so, it is no longer. In the minds of most persons the modern sailor's life is as commonplace, as prosaic, as that of a street-car conductor or a haberdashery clerk. In other words, "the sea ain't what it used to be." I have heard this said not only by landsmen but by sailors, particularly old salts who shake their heads and moan for the days of Skys'l Yard Tailor—the days when a deck-hand was paid fifteen dollars a month, worked twelve hours every day, and lived on dry cracker-hash, hardtack and pea-soup.

I REALLY believe that the seamen of Skys'l Yard Tailor's time moaned for the days of John Paul Jones, the men of the *Bon Homme Richard* spoke sadly of the days of Drake, Drake's men longed for the return of the days of Columbus, and so on back to the crew of the Ark. The things of the past are always greater than the things that we have, the men of the past are always greater than the men of the present; the prize-fighters of fifty years ago were better men than the fighters of to-day; the Orioles of the nineties could have licked our Yanks hands down; in grandfather's time the Winters were colder than now and the Summers hotter. Why do men say such things, talk such nonsense? In some specific cases these beliefs are no doubt true enough, but generally, say ninety-nine times out of a hundred, they are sheer nonsense; and, although I did not sail with Noah or Drake, or even with Jones, I believe the one regarding the sea comes under the latter heading. I am quite confident that the winds blow just as hard, fogs are just as thick, the sea runs just as high, and is approximately as deep and every bit as wet, as when Columbus landed on San Salvador.

BUT," they say, "modern appliances, vigorous law enforcement, and bigger and better ships have taken away the old lawless spirit and the element of danger." Has it? In some cases, yes; in others, no; in fact I believe the danger in many ways has been greatly increased—barring piracy, of course. A sixteen-knot liner rushing, like a blindfolded man. through a pitch-dark night has more narrow escapes per watch than the average sailing vessel had in a life-time of nosing about at her leisure—and I am not ignorant of the "record runs" made by some of the old clipper ships. An iron ship striking a submerged derelict, or other obstacle—and, whether entirely or only partly submerged, such things are almost always invisible at night—is capable of sinking herself in ten minutes. Witness the *Titanic*, the *Lusitania*, the *Cyclops*, the *Tampa*. A wooden ship, providing she is not loaded with machinery or metal, will float indefinitely. And I believe that even with modern automatic davits and lowering gear it is more difficult to lower a forty-foot life-boat from a fifty-foot-high boat deck than it is to drop a whale-boat over the side of a schooner. The *Lusitania* disaster is a very good instance of that. We have less cases of "shipwrecked men," yes; because nowadays the crew seldom has time to get clear of their sinking vessel; now it is usually a case of drowned men.

IN REGARDS to the absence of lawlessness—well, I dunno. I have seen one-half the crew of a passenger ship in irons and the other half filing them out and throwing the irons over the side; I have seen the officers of a ship relieving one another with clubs and revolvers to keep order; I know of a modern passenger vessel which was compelled to wireless for a battleship to quell a mutiny—the *Delaware* answered, by the way, and put twenty-two marines aboard to keep order; I found a man in his bunk in the forecastle with his throat cut and a group of sailors unconcernedly "rolling the bones" not ten feet away. And these things within the last five years! And it is worthy of note that not a single one of these cases saw the inside of a court of law. And for a good reason: In almost every instance where a ship case comes before a jury of landsmen the officer is placed upon the defensive—for isn't it well known by all good citizens that all mates are incorrigible bullies, and that all forecastle hands are down-trodden, abused innocents? If there is less lawlessness upon the sea now we have the sobriety and increased efficiency of the present-day officers to thank. The same reasons explain—at least to my mind—why there are not more navigational accidents at sea than there are.

AND if any one thinks the sea has lost its charm, why is it that so many men prefer being a forecastle hand at forty-five dollars a month to being a brick-layer at sixteen dollars a day? What is the answer?

With all respect to the stout old seamen of the past, and the traditions which come down to us from them, I believe that the present-day sailor is as much a "he-man"—I hate that phrase, but it seems to fit—as any man who ever wore rings in his ears or swung a cutlas. I am saying these things now because twoscore years from now I'll probably be saying, "The sea ain't what it used to be."

I could go on this way, on this subject, indefinitely, but out of respect for valuable space, and to give this mill a chance to cool, I'll not. I have probably said too much as it is, but the subject interests me; when I hear that old chestnut about "iron ships and wooden men" I become a positive menace to my friends, relations, and the law and order of the land.—WEBB.

TWO letters, written last Summer, in reply to the inquiry of Arthur G. Brodeur of our writers' brigade about a colony of Englishmen in Peru:

Leechburg, Pennsylvania.

I think I can shed a little light on the English war veteran colonists in the interior of Peru. I returned from the *montaña* of Peru at the beginning of last April, having spent a year in the departments of Puno and Madre de Dios.

SHORTLY after the war, some time in the Fall of 1920, a party of English colonists, two young war veterans, one with his wife and seven-year old boy, and an older man and his wife and son and four daughters, went into the interior of Peru to Puerto Maldonado at the Junction of the Rio Madre de Dios and the Rio Tambopata with the purpose of establishing homes on land granted them by the Peruvian Government.

To fully understand the situation in which these people were placed, it is necessary to know the country. The department of Madre de Dios is a huge section of land in the southeastern part of Peru, bordering on Brazil and Bolivia. It is practically all jungle except where it borders on the West the departments of Puno and Cuzco. There are uncivilized Indians whose numbers have only been roughly estimated and who still use the six-foot arrow and bows of the Amazon and who can find their way through forests almost impenetrable to white men more accurately than a mariner at sea. In short, it is about as far from civilization as one cares to be.

There is only one trail to Maldonado. It is a hundred miles of road to the top of the Andes and through Aricoma Pass (15,800 feet above sea-level) from Terapata on the Cuzco branch of the Southern Railroad of Peru. Then it is 130 miles by a fearsome mule-trail to Astilleros on the Tambopata River and two or three days by canoe to Maldonado.

NOW about the colonists:

None of them were farmers and things grew gradually worse till by the Fall of last year they were in rather bad straits. One of the young men, a sailor veteran of the World War, made the ten days' trip to a mining camp where I was at the time and asked for help for his friends. Through the kindness of the owner and the generosity of the boys every one was brought out and the last I saw of them they were working at the mine and sure of a living.

They arrived at camp in January of this year. On February the twelfth the Tambopata and Madre de Dios were swollen by exceptionally heavy rains and wiped out the town of Maldonado, destroying the farms and rendering homeless most every one. These rivers drain into the upper Madeira through the Beno.

AS FOR being university men or having heard of such a colony, I can say nothing. There is the Touimetti Concession in Eastern Cuzco that has been trying to get colonists for some time and then there is the more recent Dunsmuir Concession granted to Mr. Dunsmuir, a Canadian. This last is a railroad building proposition and colonization scheme capitalized at 13,500,000 pounds. At least that is what they started to raise, but I don't know whether they ever reached it. I think most of the money is American.

However, the outfit I spoke of first is the only one I know of that went out on their own hook.

I hope I have not tired you with this discourse and if Mr. Brodeur or any one else around the Camp-Fire would like to have some information regarding southeastern Peru, I would be glad to do the best I can.—DONALD R. GAILEY.

Neihart, Montana.

I note that inquiries were made at Camp-Fire concerning a recent colonization scheme in Peru. As I was in Peru at that time, perhaps I can give some information.

THE colonists came from Scotland (those that I know, although some may have been English) and were given grants of land by the Peruvian Government. This land was located in the Chanchaymayo district in the *montaña* in the eastern slope of the Andes directly east of Lima. Their expenses were paid by the Peruvian Government, which also promised them certain farming implements and stock. The idea was to get them started and to finance them until they were able to support themselves. When the colonists arrived they found that their land was in the jungle and the Government failed to supply the implements and stock as promised, so that the project fell through. Even though the Government had fulfilled its promises, it is doubtful if the project would have been successful, since transportation is by mule-back and there are no markets for the produce.

Many of the colonists returned to Scotland, their return expenses being paid by the Peruvian Government, at the insistence of the British Consul, I believe. Some of them remained and found employment with the mining companies (American) or elsewhere.

MY INFORMANT was one of those who had made an attempt at farming his land and then went to work for a mining company. He and his partner managed to clear a piece of ground and plant yucca. They got a good crop, but found no market. The result was that the crop was taken by insects helped out by the Chunchos (Indians). Then the rainy season came on, both of the men got fever and had to leave.

Some of the colonists may have been college or university graduates, although those I knew were not. Many of them were war veterans, some of whom brought their wives and families.

The land given them was extremely fertile and will produce almost anything, provided it can be kept free of insects, Indians and bush. The finest coffee in the world comes from the Chanchaymayo. The climate, however, is not suited to Anglo-Saxons.

I ALSO note that inquiries were made for the history of the word "maverick." I know members of this family, although they are not in the States now. Perhaps Mr. Albert Maverick of San Antonio, Texas, would give some information.

A recent story in *Adventure* ("Pizarro's Ring") brought to mind a tale which one of your authors may be able to use:

In Lima there is a street called El Calle de los Siete Muertos (The Street of the Seven Dead Men). The tale goes that at one time an old woman lived on this street in a more or less dilapidated building. In one wall of the building (the houses are all made of "tapia" mud put in place in a sectional form, much the same as is used in concrete) there was a hole covered with a piece of blanket. One moonlight night the woman was awakened and noticed that the blanket was pushed aside so that the moonlight showed in. She immediately found an ax and moved silently to the side of the opening. The thief, for such it was, decided that all was clear and started to crawl through the hole. When part way through the old woman struck him behind the ears with the ax, killing him silently, and dragged his body inside. She waited a moment and another thief appeared who was treated in the same manner. In all there were seven thieves who were thus killed. Hence El Calle de los Siete Muertos.—DONALD D. SMYTHE.

IN ACCORDANCE with Camp-Fire custom, Captain Kingsley Moses rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. He doesn't mention Abyssinians, the Air Service and I don't know what else, but he gives enough to indicate that he's knocked about the world quite his share:

New York

"DEAR CAMP-FIRE: Happy the man who can yank off his boots and warm his weary feet at *Adventure's* Camp-Fire. Last month the fire I knew at twilight was on the Canadian border; the month before in Oklahoma. I've sat by the coals in England, huddled frozen in the rains of France, watched beacons on the Austrian Alps and along Albanian and Dalmatian shores; wintered three times in Italy and cooked iguana in the sands of the Sahara Desert. Yes, the two pleasantest things in the world, I guess, are fire and its primeval ancestor, the sun.

Myself, I'm only a writer with a hobby for artillery-firing, swimming, and wandering over the world. I'm thirty-four years old, six feet two, a hundred and ninety pounds; and expect to write several more stories in the next sixty-six years. For any healthy man ought to live to be a hundred—with luck.

THE basis of "The Thumb" is from my own experience on board the *S. S. Newton*, John Gertsen, master, out of Naples for Newport News in the winter of 1920. The episode of the mutiny did not occur; but the cutting of a sailor and the shooting of the master and the subsequent fight between myself and the crazy negro cook, who fired in my face as I went up the companionway—these were all facts. There was much more to that particular voyage: two negroes in the brig, one for attempting murder by shooting, another by poisoning; the illness of the whole deck crew which obliged me, practically a green hand, to stay at the wheel almost continuously for 72 hours while the vessel passed Gibraltar and headed out across the Atlantic; a sleet storm with blinding fog which lasted five days and nights off the Virginia capes, and finally the exhausting of coal in our bunkers. But these are not parts of my yarn.

Naturally, though, that trip stuck in my memory; and the details of the ship *Paoli* are from the old *Newton* itself.—KINGSLEY MOSES.

OWING to an office error credit for the cover for the February 10th issue was given to H. C. Murphy instead of to the artist who did the painting—Loran F. Wilford. Mr. Murphy did not mind, but we regret very much that our blunder robbed Mr. Wilford of the credit that was his due.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow. Any member of Camp-Fire—and any one belongs to Camp-Fire who wishes to—may conduct a Camp-Fire Station and meet up with the men who are still hitting the trails of the world.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

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209—Quartzite. Buck Conner, Box 4.
Arkansas—161—Hot Springs. Tom Manning, Jr., 322 Morrison Ave.
California—28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, Cottage Inn.
38—Los Angeles, Colonel Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School, Mount Washington.
60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
89—Chico. K. W. Mason, 1428 Park Ave.
108—Helendale. G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.
113—Vallejo. Edith G. Engesser, Golden Triangle Rabbitry, Highway Homes.
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115—Los Gatos. G. H. Johnson.
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126—Covelo. Whit H. Ham. Box 388.
141—Santa Cruz. A. W. Wyatt, Capitola Road and Jose Ave.
149—San Francisco. A. H. Hutchinson, Veteran Press, 1264 Valencia St.
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210—Berkeley. Dr. Louis C. Mullikin, 305 Acheson Bldg.
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212—Del Monte. Alex H. Sokoloff, 3rd Signal Co. R. O. T. C.
Colorado—105—Grand Junction. Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.
176—Denver. Elmer S. Burrows, 3407 Larimer St.
Connecticut—103—New Haven. Ralph Pierson, 3 Yale Station.
142—Meriden. Homer H. Brown, 1 Colony Place.
D. C.—167—Washington. Walter A. Sheil, 503 Sixth St, N. E.
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117—Miami. Miami Canoe Club, 115 S. W. South River Drive.
128—Titusville. Max von Koppelow, Box 1014.
139—St. Petersburg. Capt. Lee Whetstone, Hotel Poinsettia.
143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
158—Crescent City. E. N. Clark, care *Call*.
188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.
Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald*.
Idaho—110—Pocatello. C. W. Craig, 223 S. Second Ave.
Indiana—18—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East Eighteenth St.
90—Linton. Herschell Isom, 73 Tenth St., N. E.
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66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
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189—Chicago. Herman A. Schell, 8708 Vincennes Ave.
213—Chicago. Pietro Ferraro, 1007 S. Peoria St.
Kansas—228—Leavenworth. Ben H. Lukenbill, 315 Shawnee St.
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190—Louisville. H. S. Summers, 421 W. Jefferson St.
Louisiana—191—Melville. Wm. P. Stephens.
202—New Orleans. W. Bailey, 1116 Iberville St., Cor. Basin.
228—St. Rose. C. M. Elfer.
Maine—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.
111—Lewiston. Howard N. Lary, 714 Main Street.
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82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
151—Williamsport. L. J. Schaefer. Frederick St.
Michigan—69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1133 Lincoln Ave., N. W.
79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News*, 109½ N. Washington Ave.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.
131—North Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsyth Publisher's Service, Phone 5801.
137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
193—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
227—Adrian. S. N. Cook, 221 Clinton St.
Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
145—Brainerd. F. T. Tracey, care Brainerd Gas & Electric Co.
181—Ortonville. T. Glenn Harrison. *The Ortonville Independent*.
Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Box 244.
99—Picayune. D. E. Jonson.
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94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
127—Salem. Emmet C. Higgins, 100 N. Tenth St.
Nebraska—95—Omaha. L. W. Stewart, 119 No. 16th St.
214—Tecumseh. Dr. C. F. Roh.

New Mexico—96—Silver City. Edward S. Jackson, Box 435.
203—Elephant Butte via Engle. Henry Stein.
229—Santa Fe. N. Howard Thorp, 103 Palace Ave.
New Jersey—17—Caldwell. Chas. A. Gerlard. Box 13.
164—Chatham. Roy S. Tinney.
91—Tenafly. Ed Stiles, P. O. Box 254.
146—Paterson. Charles S. Gall, 378 Dakota St.
New York—23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
107—New York City. Bronx Division, U. S. Junior Naval Reserves, 3132 Webster Ave.
147—Youngsville. Harry Malowitz, Youngsville House.
165—Saratoga. Wm. Marshall, Office No. 9, Chamber of Commerce Arcade.
171—Albany. 224 Greene St.
177—Brooklyn. George Iverson, 306 Macon St.
185—Brooklyn. J. M. Canavan, 69 Bond St.
193—Niagara Falls. Roy Tompkins, 1155 Garret Ave.
194—Hadley. Mrs. Chas. H. Black.
204—Buffalo. Joseph T. Rozar, 198 Madison St.
205—Newburgh. Jacques Teller, 5 Golden St.
215—George's Sport Shop, 45 Main St., Yonkers.
226—Red Hook. P. W. E. Hart, care of E. D. Knappen, R. D.
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159—Waynesville. Harry M. Hall, 720 Walnut St.
92—Biltmore. C. Marshall Gravatt, Felstone Co.
North Dakota—160—Fargo. James E. Cowan, Central Garage, rear Grand Theater.
206—Fairmount. Frank Kitchener, Richland Hotel.
Ohio—58—Cleveland. J. F. Thompson, Community Pharmacy, 9505 Denison Ave.
52—Ulrichsville. Anthony Sciarra, 329 W. Fourth St.
63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water St.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
113—Buena Vista. Geo. T. Watters.
166—Toledo. Frank P. Carey, 3267 Maplewood Ave., or wherever his Ford happens to be.
207—Columbsu. Tod S. Raper, 77 Taylor Ave.
Oklahoma—57—Haskell. Roy Holt.
225—Shawnee. A. M. Postlethwaite, 521 N. Beard St.
Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.
187—Portland. W. J. Belduke, 29½ N. Ninth St.
216—Portland. Miss Billie Russell, 532 E. 19th St.
Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
21—Braddock. Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach. 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P. & R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
78—Pittsburgh. Peter C. Szarmach, 350 Harmer St.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
121—Philadelphia. Don L. Brown, 3444 D St.
152—Harrisburg. Mrs. L. H. Wistrand, Washington Heights, Lemoyne.
182—Greensburg. Don Frederick Wermuth.
224—Oil City. J. M. Blair, 608 W. Front St.
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South Carolina—217—Charleston. J. H. Keener, 346 King St.
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134—Breckenridge. Joe Randel, 226 Baylor Avenue.
135—Mexia. Charles O. Hurley, M. D.
148—Port Arthur. Ralph C. Cornwell, 215 Eighth St.
174—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West Eighth St.
183—South San Antonio. J. F. Nicodemus, Box 111, So. San Antonio Transfer.
218—Fort Worth. Robert Lentz, R No. 6 Box 73.
208—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West 8th St.
Utah—157—Salt Lake City. Ned Howard, 127 N. St.
Vermont—56—Fort Ethan Allen. E. Worth Benson, Box 10.
Virginia—108—Cape Charles. Lynn Stevenson, Custom House Building.
219—Richmond. Wm. Meek, 104 S. 1st St.
Washington—1—Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book-Store, 1330 First Ave.
153—Monroe. Ed. L. Carson, *The Monitor.*
154—Mt. Vernon. Miss Beatrice Bell, Western Washington Auto Club.
155—Olympia. B. F. Hume, Commercial Club Rooms.
172—Sunnyside. Mark Austin.
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220—Sultan. George W. Snyder, Main St., opp. Post Office.
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138—Tomahawk Lake. Mrs. J. S. Hughson, Hughson's Resort.
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130—Brisbane. H. V. Shead, Sutton St., Kangaroo Pt.
Belgium—131—Antwerp. Reuben S. James, Place de l'Entrepot 3.
Bermuda—230—St. George's. Fred C. Taylor, Wainright Cottage.
British Columbia—231—Stewart. Jack O'Shea, Ryan Bldg.
Canada—31—Howe Sound. C. Plowden, Plowden Bay.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
22—Burlington, Ontario. T. M. Waumsly, Jocelyn Bookstore.
4—Dunedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
29—Deseronto. Harry M. Moore, *The Post Weekly.*
45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 84 La Riviere St.
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102—Amherst. Lloyd E. MacPherson, 5 Belmont St.
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Great Britain—65—North Wales. William J. Cooper, "Kia-Ora," Plastirion Ave., Prestatyn.
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Honduras, C. A.—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.
70—La Ceiba. Jos Buckly Taylor.
India—197—Calcutta. W. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.
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136—Tampico, Tamps. Jack Hester, care of T. D. E. Humpo, Apartado 238.
223—Mazatlan, Sin. Paul L. Horn, Hotel de France, Apartado 102.
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140—U. S. *Shawmut.* J. D. Montgomery.
Porto Rico—46—Ensenada. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 5.
Philippine Islands—198—Manila. W. W. Weston, De La Rama Bldg.
West Indies—199—Santo Domingo. A. W. Wells, Estate Consuelo, San Pedro de Marcoris, R. D.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, 3633 New Hampshire Ave., N. W., Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage two cents.*)

7. South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
CHARLES BROWN, JR., P. O. Box 308, San Francisco, Calif. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

8. ★ Australia and Tasmania
FRANK MORTON, care *Triad* magazine, 19 Castlereagh St.; Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage ten cents.*)

9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

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12. Hawaiian Islands and China
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★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with ten cents in stamps NOT attached*)

13. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

14. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
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15. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
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18. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
Robert Simpson, care *Adventure*. Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

19. ✠ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
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21. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
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25. Africa Part 8 Sudan
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28. Albania
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

29. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
Lieut. William Jenna, Plattsburg Barracks, N. Y. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

30. Scandinavia
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
Fred F. Fleischer, 464 Park Ave., West New York, N. J. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

32. Great Britain
Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information.

33. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
Edgar Young, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topograply, minerals, game, languages, customs.

34. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
William R. Barbour, Room 423 Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

35. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

36. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

37. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

38. Mexico Part 2 Southern and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, care of Roadmaster, S. P. Co., San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

39. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

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T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

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Ed. L. Carson, Monroe, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

44. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

45. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

46. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, Larkspur,, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

47. Baffinland and Greenland
Victor Shaw, 2933 W. 25th Ave., Denver, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

48. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

49. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance; oil-fields; hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

50. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
Frank Middleton, 509 Frémont St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

51. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
Chester C. Davis, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with three cents in stamps—in Mr. Beadle's case twelve cents—NOT attached*)

52. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country

R. T. Newman, care of Anaconda Copper Mining Co., Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

53. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.

J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

54. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.

JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

55. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

56. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

57. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River

GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

58. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks

RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

59. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers

HOWARD A. SHANNON, care of *Adventure*. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville

HOWARD A. SHANNON, care of *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

61. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

62. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.

HAPSBURG LIEBE, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

63. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, 2933 W. 25th Ave., Denver, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns**, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers**, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Tropical Forestry

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

LIEUT.-COL. W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

FRED. F. FLEISCHER, 464 Park Ave., West New York, N. J. *United States:* Military history, military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

I.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

ARTHUR WOODWARD, 217 W. 125th St., New York. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

J.—STANDING INFORMATION

For Camp-Fire Stations write J. Cox, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions**, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico**, and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also Dept. of the Interior Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American** matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Personal

READERS have been asking for the autobiographies of "Ask Adventure" editors; and those staff members who believe that a few words about themselves will promote better acquaintanceship all around, are responding to the request. The order in which these autobiographies are printed doesn't signify anything. They are withdrawn from the file at random:

DEAR MR. NOYES:—

In response to your request for something autobiographic, I'm passing the buck to my good friend Mohamed Ali, of Morocco, to let *him* tell you something about George Holt, sometime Kaid Abdelkhader, Chief of Nonwish and El-Menaar, the Sons of Hercules. Mohamed Ali's epistle is attached. At my suggestion he has confined himself to my Moroccan life, as that would seem to be the only thing of interest to "A. A." readers. Mohamed Ali asks me to tell you that if he has written at too great length, he will not hold it against you if you shorten his letter.

Sincerely yours,
GEORGE E. HOLT.

Mohamed Ali's letter follows in full:

Now Allah knows that I have much affection in my heart for this friend of my people, and I would gladly do that which is requested of me. But I am a simple-minded man, and, having read some of the tales that Kaid Abdelkhader has recorded of me, and having been much amazed at the manner in which he makes small things big, I know not whether to do likewise, imagining that which I do not know, or whether to state my knowledge without unnecessary words and pleasant half-truths.

However, it came about, in the first month of the new year of 1907, according to the calendar of the *Nazrini*, that one Sidi Holt came to our city of Tangier to write of things that he might observe. These writings were to be published in journals in the United States of America, and, before coming to Al Moghreb al-Acksa, or Morocco as you know it, Sidi Holt had traveled and observed and written about matters in the British Islands and somewhat in Spain and Gibraltar. If I remember correctly, he had been editor of a newspaper before coming abroad—although this, I think, should not be held to his discredit, inasmuch as he was very young at the time.

Now, at that time I was somewhat disinclined to be friends with a *Nazrini*, especially one from the United States of America, for it had so happened, not long before, that I found it necessary, in order to save myself from my enemies, to seize and hold for ransom, and guarantee, an American citizen, just as, after I became friends with Sidi Holt, it became necessary for me to hold captive an Englishman. That is politics merely. But I soon observed that Sidi Holt was sympathetic to the Moroccans. No man of good heart should have been otherwise, except that he did not understand, for this time was the beginning of the French conquest of my country by means of the *Penetration Pacifique*—pacific penetration—which meant that trouble of every sort was made by France in order that it would appear necessary, to the eyes of the world, to send French soldiers to Morocco and thus to secure control of the land—even though the famous Act of Algeciras guaranteed "the integrity of the Sultan's domains." Hmph! "I will protect you," said the wolf to the lamb.

Five years it required for France to gain the country—and all of the events of these last years of "Sunset Land" were observed by Sidi Holt, who shortly after his arrival had been placed by his country in a position well to observe them. That is to say, he was made American Vice Consul General, and very shortly thereafter became Acting Consul General, besides which he served as the American member of certain of the international committees provided for the good of Morocco by the Act of Algeciras—the Committee of Public Works, which built harbors and bridges and roads and other public conveniences; the Committee on Awards in General, and the Committee on Tariff. Besides which, I believe, he was a member of the Commission d'Hygiene for the city of Tangier, and also Judge of the American Consular Court.

By the grace of Allah, Sidi Holt served thus for nearly five years, and during this time came to learn how we think. He traveled among us, and his ears were ever open for the truth—which is not always easy to gain. Many officials, I have observed, feel that they demean themselves by any sympathy with another people, and believe understanding unnecessary. But Sidi Holt visited our officials and ate salt with them, and went among our villages and dipped his fingers into the *kesk'soo* bowl with high and low.

And thus he came to know us, and we to know him—and because of this, and also because of the fact that he gave even the poorest of us justice and straight words, we called him "the Just Judge," and when he was about to go back to his own country two of our villages in the Riff elected him their *kaid*, or chief. This, I think, was the first time that any American had been so treated, and also the first time that any *Nazrini* had been chosen to office among us by popular vote.

Now I could tell you about my friend many things which interested me, because they lay close to my heart, but they might be of no interest at all to you. Because he did not approve of the stealing of our country he was in danger; but the mantle of Allah's protection was about him. Especially after he had saved two of our villages from destruction. . . .

Upon one occasion he showed his confidence in our friendship by visiting me at Arzila at a time just after I had held the Englishman captive and when I was somewhat feared by all foreigners. But he was well aware of a thing which others refused to believe—that I was no low bandit, as many called me, but a *shareef*, a Descendant of the Prophet, who had been forced into so-called outlawry in self-defense. Also he knew that I was a patriot and did not wish to see my country eaten up by Europe. Thus Sidi Holt, or to give him our name, Kaid Abdelkhader, knew and talked with many of our men—Sid Mohamed Torres, who for twenty years controlled our foreign relations; Kaid Bushta el-Bagdadi, Governor of El K'sar and Commander-in-Chief of the Moroccan Army; Sid Benees, the

Sultan's representative in Tangier; Mulai Amrani, the Sultan's uncle and Governor of Shawia Province, where the French secured their first military foothold by the bombardment of Casablanca; the Bashas Belghazi, Boaschareen, Guebbas, Shawy, and his Shareefian Majesty, the Sultan Abd-ul-Aziz.

These were the days when Sir Harry Maclean was military instructor for the Sultan's Army; when General D'Amade was chief of the French forces in Shawia, and Mangin, now a general of the World War, was a lieutenant or captain who frequented the polo field and social gatherings; when H. R. H. Don Jaime de Borbon, cousin of Alphonso XIII, Duke of Madrid and pretender to the Spanish throne, visited Tangier frequently; when the English woman Emily Keane, was her Highness the Shariffa of Wazzan and the head of all Moslem women in Morocco; and when Abd-el-Malek of Algeria came to Tangier to plan revolution. And from these and many others my friend learned of our affairs.

Since he left Al-Moghreb I learn that his feet have fallen upon a less exciting road. I have seen a book he wrote about my country—but there was little meat to it. Because, he tells me, the English publishers would not print the portion which told how France had stolen our country from us. This was just before the Great War; I think England would not be so considerate now. Hmph! The friendship of nations is as the breaths of Spring.

What Kaid Abdelkhader did after his return to his own country I do not understand; your business operations are strange to us. But I do know that of late as I have already written, he writes tales of my country and of me without shame or consideration. Still—I am his friend as he is mine, and, to tell the truth, although I have *not* done some of the things he has written of, I should like to have done them. Wherefore may Allah the Compassionate and Merciful smile upon him, and protect him, though he be not one of the Faithful.—Mohamed Ali.

The Pas, Man., Canada.

I suppose none of us lead lives absolutely devoid of adventure and more or less interesting experiences. Whether or not I have yet had my fill of life's vicissitudes it is hard to say; but in some thirty years I have succeeded in covering a fair amount of territory.

From tropical Australia to the northern wilds of Canada is a fairly far cry; but I have managed to exist in both countries—exist, by the way, is just about all I have managed to do on more than one occasion.

A few years engaged principally in newspaper work in Australia was followed by a trip to France and Belgium with the "Aussies" when those particular countries were in more or less of a turmoil. When the inhabitants of Europe decided to settle down to a little less strenuous life a position in London, England, in connection with publicity work for the Australian Government seemed to offer a rather attractive change.

London after six months, however, appeared to have lost its attraction, and a suggestion that I accompany a friend to northern Canada came as a welcome interlude. "Six months and we would be back in Australia," he promised; but those six months and more than 36 additional ones have passed; and still I am breezing around north of 53, offering myself as a human sacrifice to the flies and mosquitoes during the brief Summer months and trying in vain to prevent my proboscis and other most striking features from attracting the frost during the long Winter.

Participating in gold rushes, assisting in political campaigns and helping to organize dog-races have helped to pass away the time, while occasional newspaper and magazine articles have, up to date, kept the ever present wolf from actually breaking through the shack door.—Reece H. Hague.

Bangor, Me.

Graduate Tufts Dental School, Class '85. Practised profession in Bangor five years; gave up on account of health; went on road as traveling representative of Angier Chem. Co.; later on traveled for Reed & Carnrick of New York, now of Jersey City; in about two years went back to practise of profession, working in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Maine; opened an office for myself in Augusta, Me.; fifteen years there; moved to Bangor, Me., my "home town;" opened an office here; was burned out in the "big fire" in 1911.

Was appointed forest fire warden in 1912; next year promoted to chief and the following year to inspector of the service in the territory north of Moosehead Lake. The next Summer I spent in my office attending to my practise, which was going "on the rocks;" the next Spring the "call of the woods" was so strong I closed my office and went in the "bush" as a guide. The next season was appointed game warden in the western part of the State, near New Hampshire border—no, I am wrong; I was a fire warden on Allagash Lake that year, and the next year served as game warden.

Was appointed inspector of game at Union Station in this city four years ago, and have held the office since that time. I go on duty at 7 P.M. and remain until 1.30 A.M. At 8 A.M. I am in my office; remain until 6 P.M. I sleep the rest of the time, and am not troubled with insomnia.

While I have all the business that I can do in my profession, I will stop work any time and gossip on fishing, hunting or a canoe trip. I have many friends numbered among the sporting fraternity—guides, sporting-camp owners, and woodsmen, lumbermen, etc., throughout the State. I am a member of the Maine Sportsmen's Association, Penobscot Valley Fish and Game Association, and Maine Game Wardens' Association; P. C. Calanthe Lodge, K. of P.; and member Orient Lodge, I. O. O. F.; St. Andrew's Lodge, F. & A. M., and St. John's Commandery, K. T.—Dr. G. E. Hathorne.

Husky Dogs as Scrappers

THEY'RE better as workers and racers:

Question:—"Where or from whom can I secure a 'husky' pup or malemiut? Are they the same thing or two different breeds? Also, what is the average size and weight of a full-grown male?

What I want is a dog of large size and one amply able to take care of himself in a scrap. Will the husky fill the bill? Any information as to the nature of this breed will be greatly appreciated by me.

Thanking you in advance, I am enclosing self-addressed envelop containing coin for return postage."—R. Z. Philips, Washington, D. C.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—There is no scarcity of huskies in this part of the country; but a really good dog runs fairly high in price, as both working and racing dogs are usually in demand and bring as much as one hundred dollars a head. The malemiut is the Alaskan equivalent of our husky and is generally smaller in size, huskies running up to one hundred pounds in weight, although the average weight of a full-grown dog is about sixty to eighty pounds.

I don't know that I would recommend the average husky as a fighter. They are sometimes ferocious and fight well in a mob; but in my experience the husky is no match for the Airedale and other breeds.

You should be able to pick up a promising pup in these parts for about twenty-five dollars, although it is not easy to say whether a likely pup will make a really good dog. Occasionally a whole litter will develop into fine dogs; but this is an exception rather than a rule, and frequently only one out of a litter of six will be really good.

It would cost you about twenty-five dollars to have a pup expressed from here to the United States, and there might also be duty to be paid when you cross the border; but I can not say definitely. Arrangements have also to be made to feed the dog *en route*. The best thing is to have a crate made and tie the food on to it with instructions to the train attendant as to feeding.

It is also doubtful whether the husky would do as well in the warmer climate as it does in its native country. Taking everything into consideration, I am not very sure that you would find the husky particularly satisfactory; but if you decide to secure one, drop me a line and I shall arrange with one of the local dog-owners to ship you one.

The full statement of the sections in this department, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Make Your Questions Specific

ANOTHER inquirer who just shuts his eyes and pulls the trigger. See Rule 4 in the big black type on page 183:

Question:—"Kindly send me general information from 22. Africa, Part 5, Morocco."—F. Logor, Nordegg, Alta., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Holt: It is my desire, as it is the desire of all members of the "Ask Adventure" staff, to give inquirers information. The form of your request, however, makes this impossible—just as impossible as it would be for you to reply to a request from me that you tell everything about Canada. There have been a good many hundred books written on Canada—and there have been still more books written on Morocco (which, incidentally, was settled some thousands of years before Canada) and consequently it is quite impossible to give general information about the country in a letter.

Now if your letter had given me any indication as to what particular line of information you wanted I could have given it to you. If farming, I could have told you something about farming; if stock-raising, I could have told you something about stock-raising; of mining, or travel, or language, or tribes, or religion—any sort of a peg to hang something on. In view of your situation I would suggest that you let me know a little more definitely the line of information you want. I shall be pleased to give it to you.

In the mean time it would be well, I think, for you to secure if possible a good book on Morocco and look it over. If you can get Budgett Meakin's "Morocco and the Moors" that is probably the best. Eugene Aubin's "Morocco of Today" is another excellent book. The Encyclopedia Britannica—and probably any other encyclopedia that you can get hold of—will give you "general information" although naturally greatly abbreviated.

Please be assured that I will be glad to tell you anything I can about Morocco if you will only indicate what special line you are interested in.

Tatar Tongues and Ways

HOW Mongolians jail a man without resorting to the use of a jail:

Question:—"I am writing for information in regard to the tribes of Mongolia.

1. What is the Mongol word for "wolf"? For "tiger"? For "sword"?
2. Is the language used by the Mongols similar to that of the Tatars?
3. Do the Kirghiz inhabit Mongolia or Chinese Turkestan?
4. Are there any Baskir tribes in Chinese Turkestan, and are they allied to the Turkomans?
5. Am I right in supposing that swords or simitars still form an important part of a Mongol or Tatar warrior's armament?
6. Do the Mongol and Tatar tribes worship Erlik, Bon or Buddha? Or all three?
7. Is it still customary for the tribes to meet at some place and engage in wrestling, horse-racing and other contests?
8. Is polygamy practised?
9. What are the different forms of punishment by law and tribal custom?
10. What are the powers of the khan of a tribe?
11. About what is the population of Mongolia?"

—Robert E. Howard, Cross Plains, Tex.

Answer, by Dr. Twomey:—I will try to answer some of your questions in this letter and write you again as soon as I can secure the information you desire.

1. Will report later.
2. No, Mongol and Tatar are separate languages. Furthermore there are several branches of Mongols and Tatars, and each branch has a different language. Among the Tatars there are the Manchu, Mongol, Chinese, Tibetan and Siberian Tatars. These tribes are mixtures of the old Tatar stock and the other tribes. In Siberia there are also the Buriats, who are of Tatar origin and who have their own language. All these tribes have many words in

common and many words peculiar to themselves. The Mongols are now also mixed with other tribes, and while they adhere to many of their ancient customs their language is mixed with many words from the Chinese and other languages.

3. The Kirghiz tribes inhabit Sinkiang or Chinese Turkestan.

4. Will report later.

5. Yes. The Mongols and Tatars have adopted modern firearms whenever they can get them, but the sword is still an important part of their armament.

6. Have never heard of Erlik. Can you send more information? Several well-posted people whom I have asked have never heard of this term.

Bon is the name of the religion affected by the Tibetans before the advent of Buddhism. At present the Tatars and Mongols are adherents of Lamaism, a corrupt form of Buddhism.

Lamaism is under control of the Dalai Lama at Lassa. He is supposed to be a reincarnation of Buddha. Under him are three living Buddhas in Tibet. These men are reincarnations of some of the most famous Buddhist saints. At Urga in northern Mongolia is another living Buddha, known to the Mongols as the Bogda. He is the holy man of the Mongols and derives his authority direct from Lassa.

7. Yes. If you will write to the Pioneering Company, Kalgan, Mongolia, *via* Peking, they will send you a lot of information about this subject. They own a large ranch in Mongolia and every year entertain tourists with a *fiesta* of Mongol sports.

8. Yes, to a limited extent. As in most other countries where polygamy is practised, it depends on the wealth of the men. Usually in Mongolia the officials are the only ones who can afford to possess more than one wife.

9. Fines, whipping, imprisonment and in aggravated cases imprisonment in a small box. This box is locked. It contains a small hole, through which the friends and relatives of the prisoner can feed him if they wish. The prisoner is left in this box until he dies of starvation if his friends do not feed him.

10. As in all pastoral countries, the chief has nominal power. He is usually the head of a family or group of families, and much is settled by family conferences. Most of the temporal and spiritual authority in Mongolia is in the hands of the lamas.

11. Nobody knows. No census has ever been taken. The tribes are migratory, and no census can be taken. Some authorities say the population is about five million; but your guess is as good as theirs.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Converting a Springfield to a Sporter

EX-SOLDIERS may be glad to know how to adapt a weapon of warfare to the ways of peace:

Question:—"I am the fortunate possessor of one of the old Army Springfields and would like to have your suggestions for its conversion into a sporting rifle.

I have some ammunition and upon trying out the gun, found that, although the ammunition was apparently O. K. and the gun functioned, there was no explosion. Can it be possible that the firing-pin is worn?

I am enclosing a stamped, addressed envelop for your convenience."—ARTHUR O. MARDEN, Albany, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—In order to convert the old Springfield to a sporter, I will recommend a stock made to your personal measure, a set of Lyman sights, the barrel cut off and turned down, the barrel and action reblued and the stock checked. This will cost around seventy-five dollars, and makes a sporting rifle equal to any to be had today. I presume you refer to the .30 caliber, of course.

To work over the rifle, allow me to recommend Sportsman's Service Station, Tenafly, N. J.

I have a worked-over Krag, the work done by myself, and like it very much. My Springfield is being kept "as issued," however, to qualify for the shooting in the Government courses.

I suspect a broken or rusted firing-pin as the cause of failure to explode the cartridge. Take it apart and give it the O. O. and you will be able to locate the trouble, I'm sure.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

The Everglades

COUNTRY which has given Florida its nickname:

Question:—"I am thinking of going to Florida so would like to ask some questions.

I am thinking of doing some hunting and fishing, and working enough to keep down expenses.

I have a rifle, fishing and camping outfit; am used to traveling and would like to know something of the Everglades.

1. What is the best way to go?
2. How are the chances for work?
3. Can a person get an Indian to guide him in the Everglades?
4. How are the timber and fishing industries there?
5. About what is the fare from Baltimore to Jacksonville?

I shall have probably $150 in cold cash to start the trip. Am single and in good health. Now then what would you advise me to do?

If this is printed please do not use my name."—R. M. R., Columbia, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—The Everglades mean "Grassy Water." It is the Indian name, and it is a good one. There are miles upon miles of flat, grassy land covered with water, usually very shallow and filled with grasses. Now and then there is a "gut" or "slough" (a creek). Now and then also there is a big swamp filled with trees. Sometimes you will find a lake all edged with sawgrass. There are little dry spots called "islands," or "hummocks," with trees on them. The water is usually clear, but for the most part has a limy, slippery taste.

There isn't much game in the 'Glades proper, but on the higher land in the vicinity of the 'Glades there are deer, turkey, panther, little black bear, raccoon, fox-squirrel, etc., especially in those places that are farthest from civilization. Now to your numbered questions:

1. The best way to go, I should say, is by rail to Miami if you are going into the 'Glades; or else by rail to Ft. Myers, thence by boat down to Chokoloskee or Everglade—this on the Gulf Coast, which affords by far the best hunting.

2. Chances for work in the Winter are apt to be slim. So many people come down here each Winter with the intention of working their way through.

3. You can perhaps get an Indian guide, but I think I'd rather have a white man, though white men come higher in wages than Indians.

4. The timber industry is not a big one in Florida any more, though there is always more or less of it going on. There is always a lot of fishing—in open seasons, of course—along the coasts and in Lake Okeechobee.

5. As for the fare from Baltimore to Jacksonville, you can find out from your station agent.

One hundred and fifty dollars is none too much for the trip. In fact, unless you can manage to work a little, it wouldn't see you through, I'm afraid. Florida, I might mention, is not a very good place to go broke in!

As to what I would advise you to do, I don't know. I rarely advise people in cases like this. It's rather up to you to decide. Of course, if you are sufficiently resourceful you can get something to do, at some kind of a price at least.

You sent twelve cents too much in stamps. Only a stamp and self-addressed envelop are required. I am returning the stamps herewith.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Water Power of South America

A CATARACT bigger than Niagara:

Question:—"I am writing you for whatever information you can give me regarding the parts of South America covered under your section of 'Ask *Adventure.*' I may as well state that I am an electrical engineer and wish to form a connection with some large South American concern. I prefer Brazil, Guiana or Argentina."—E. F. CUSHMAN, Bryant Pond, Me.

Answer, by Mr. Barbour:—British Guiana has so far little electrical development except for electric lighting at Georgetown, the capital. There are few power-using industries. Available water power is great, as there are tremendous falls in the interior.

Brazil has progressed further, especially along the coast—Para, Pernambuco, Bahia and Rio de Janeiro. There are in those cities power plants galore, street railways, telegraph and telephone systems, etc. The market and possibilities have been as yet scarcely touched, however. In the undeveloped interior of Brazil very many thousands of horse-power of water power await harnessing. It will come in time.

Argentina is the furthest advanced. I enclose a printed résumé of conditions there. Buenos Aires has electric street railways and trains to the suburbs. There is little manufacturing as yet. The high cost of coal, which is all imported, has held down manufacturing.

In the northeast corner of Argentina, at the junction with Paraguay and Brazil (Territory of Misiones) is Iguazú Falls, higher and with a greater volume of water than Niagara. Its distance from consuming centers has so far prevented power developments there, but they will come.

Regarding work, I can only suggest that you correspond with the General Electric Company, Western Electric Company and Westinghouse Electric Company, all of which have connections in South America. As an electrical engineer you no doubt know the home addresses of these firms.

You might also write the Anaconda Copper Company, Chile Copper Company and Cerro de Pasco Company (address "New York" will reach them). From time to time they send technical men to their mines in Peru and Chile, which are highly electrified.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

In the Maine Woods

FISHING, camping, hunting, trapping:

Question:—"Could you answer the following questions: The location of the best trout streams; the best time to fish them; whether natural or artificial bait is best at such times—meaning artificial flies or worms; the best way to get to such region?

I intend to make a fishing-trip as soon as I get out of the Service for the sake of hardening up again. I intend camping; and as I and the partner I intend taking are both hardened campers and I know the fishing end of it we would like to make a success of it.

If you could tell me a town or village where we could get our supplies and make a kind of base I would be much obliged.

I would also like to know the best trapping section and the nature of the fur-bearing animals in it, and if there would be good hunting; also what kind of hunting? We are both expert shots on the military Springfield rifle, so if you could recommend a rifle that would be a good all-round gun I would know what to get.

We intend making the fishing-trip at one time of the year and the hunting and trapping cruise at the proper time. Could you give me a rough estimate of what the fishing-trip would cost exclusive of guides and fishing-gear—say a trip of two months, working from stream to stream with a light outfit?" —PVT. LEWIS N. MACLEOD, Portsmouth, Va.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—There are no "best trout streams" in the State, but there are hundreds of them as good as the best in any State. I could take you within a few miles of Bangor at the right season and get all the law allows. The best season depends on the conditions of the water, etc. In some places there is good fishing as soon as the ice goes out in the Spring; but as a rule the best fishing is from the first of June to the middle of July.

Both natural and artificial bait is used. The garden worm is best early, and later they will take the fly.

There is good fishing in the Magalloway region in the western part of the State, reached from Berlin, N. H., by stage, in the Rangely Lake region, reached by rail; and in the Moosehead Lake region, reached by rail. I would suggest that you write to

Geo. M. Houghton of the B. & A. R.R., Bangor, for a copy of the book, "In the Maine Woods." This will give you a whole lot of information about the fishing-regions reached by that road, also a lot of other valuable information for the fisherman.

If you intend to make a camping-trip you had better write to the Fish and Game Commission, Augusta, Me., for a copy of the Fish and Game Laws of the State. All non-resident fishermen must have a fishing-license—cost $3.15; and if they are camping and *building fires* on wild land must be accompanied by a registered guide.

If you should come to Moosehead Lake you could get all your supplies at the terminus of the railroad, and you could also get your guide at the same place. If you put up at a sporting-camp you would not require a guide.

There are many good trapping-sections in the northern part of the State, and plenty of large game. The fur-bearing animals are mink, otter, muskrat, beaver, fox, weasel, skunk, black cat.

I consider the .30-.30 Winchester as good as any gun for big game.

A hunting-license will cost $15. I should say it would cost somewhere in the vicinity of $100 for a two months' trip exclusive of guides.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

COOPER, ANDREW D. Formerly of Dayton, Ohio. Last known to be a private in the Casual Supply Company, Camp Merritt, N. J. Any information will be appreciated.—Address RICHARD BUTLER, 229 Clifford Court, Madison, Wis.

HONEY. I'm so sorry. Please come back or let me hear from you quick. Am so changed you need not fear further temper.—PUSSY.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SHARPE, LESTER E. Height 5 feet seven inches, complexion light, age thirty-five, weight one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Last heard from in Santa Anna, Calif., 1920. A cook. May be suffering from wounds received in action in the late war. His family is very anxious to hear from him. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address A. L. SHARPE, R.R. No. 4, Mt. Vernon, Washington.

THOMPSON, CHESTER. Last heard of in the spring of 1919. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MOTHER and June, Gen. Del., San Francisco, Calif.

ROGERS, ELLIS, or Gosh Harvey or any one knowing the address of Jack Robertson who served in Canadian Air Force in 1921. Please write to your buddy.—Address R. Allen, 1241 E. 105th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

CAPLES, ALBERT. Last heard of about four years ago in Oklahoma. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. LOU CAPLES, 1419 Charlotte St., Kansas City, Mo.

MURRAY, RICHARD H. Would like to hear from you as soon as possible—Address J. G. MCKINNEY, care of Post Master, *U.S.S. New York*, San Pedro, Calif.

RENZ, CARRIE and George. Last heard of in Oregon. Their cousin Daisy B. would like to hear from them.—Address MRS. R. BURKE, 538-D 8th St., San Pedro, Calif.

TOM. Celeste needs operation. Send money at once.—ETHEL.

CARRERE, JOSEPH MAXWELL, JR. Left New York City and Tulsa, Okla., for San Francisco, where he was to start in business. Served with me in Battery A First Trench Mortar Battalion, A.E.F. Any information will be appreciated by his buddie.—Address JOHN WEISBERGER, 2313 Douglas St., Omaha, Nebraska.

HOWE, CHARLES. Last heard from at Mountain Quarries, Auburn, Calif. Any information will be appreciated by his nephew.—Address J. A. HOWE, 91st Observation Squadron, U. S. Air Service, Crissy Field, Calif.

E. K. Please write to me in care of American Cedar Co., C-17, Kelliher, Minn.—H. J.

OLSON, LAWRENCE T. Everything is all right. We are all anxious about you. Please write and give us your address.—MOTHER.

W. N. S. Write to mother. Same address Casa de Campa. Write for letters mailed *Adventure* Magazine. Come home.—A. M. S.

CATE, WILLIAM C. Last heard from Dec., 1922, in Seattle, Wash. He was thinking of going to Alaska. Age twenty-six, brown hair, blue eyes, height five feet eleven inches. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. RUTH A. HATFIELD, R. 9, Trenton, Mo.

LONG, LEONARD C. Formerly located at 129 E. Milwaukee, cor. Brush, operating a meat market in the rear of a grocery in 1920 at Detroit, Mich. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ARTHUR R. WILBER, care of The Billboard, Cincinnati, Ohio.

UHL, JAMES (RED). Cook on *SS. Council Bluffs* in 1917. Please drop me a line.—Address STEPHEN, SOS., 2752 McDonald Place, Detroit, Mich.

TRAINOR, OWEN P. The stranger whom you helped in that fight on Calle O'Reilly in Habana, would like to hear from you. You gave me your card if you remember, and told me to "holler when hurt."—Address JACK BOYLE, care of *Adventure.*

CHARLES, come home to Toledo. We want you.—DAD.

MCRAE, NORMAL N. Everything is O.K. Your wife has signed clear of all claim to your effects both real and personal. The farm and Joe are still yours. Write.—Address R. E. ZORNES, 4059 12th St., Chicago, Ill.

KANE, THOMAS EDWARD. Formerly on *U.S.S. Dupont.* Saw service in Turkey on *Edsall.* Discharged March, 1923. Home was in Toledo, Ohio. Has a sister by the name of Mrs. Brown in that city. Any information will be appreciated.—Address LOUIS B. CARLSEN, care of Mrs. F. Hill, Gen. Del., Brooklyn, N. Y.

EDWARDS, THOMAS. Last heard of at the signing of the Armistice, at which time he was with the A.E.F. in France. A communication from the adjutant general states that he was discharged April 27, 1919, at Ft. D. A. Russell, Wyo. Any information will be greatly appreciated by the TACOMA CHAPTER, AMERICAN RED CROSS, 504 State Bldg., Tacoma, Wash., or his cousin, Mrs. Everett Moore, Orting, Wash.

C. B. What you ask in your letter is granted, so cheer up. Let me know address and I will send your clothes.—Address C. D.

TOMLIN, BRADLEY. Address is Quicksand, Ky. Married Amelia Lewis in Toronto, Ont., Can., July 1918, while serving in the U. S. Army, then stationed at Fort Niagara, N. Y. Last heard from in August, 1918. Any information will be appreciated by his wife.—Address AMELIA TOMLIN, 458 Lewis St., Ottawa, Canada.

MORGAN, JOHN. Left New Port News, Va., about twenty-five years ago for the west. Last heard of in California. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address FRANK MORGAN, 634 6th Ave., S. W. Roanoke, Va.

THORP, WILLIAM. Age about twenty-two years. Was employed for some time in the Famous-Lasky studios. Met him in London eighteen months ago, when I was at the university, studying to become a journalist. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address THEO. J. LOVELL, care of Mrs. MacPherson, 30 N. Lindsay St., Dundee, Scotland.

HANSEN, ANDERS. Born in Denmark. Last heard of in Ottawa, Ont., Canada, in 1917, when he enlisted in the C. E. F. Your daughter and son-in-law are anxious to hear from you.—Address OTTO POULSON, 717 Powell St., Vancouver, B. C., Can.

DOUGLAS, WALLACE C. Last heard from was in Water Service of some railroad running out of Little Rock or Fort Smith, Ark. Age about eighteen or twenty years. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ALBERT R. SMITH, Fort Madison, Iowa.

UNCLAIMED MAIL

BALLMAN, C. DE M., Cadwallader, John R.; Irving, Thos. L.; Ogden, Carl M.; Shannon, Howard A.; Sorensen, Wm. Neil; Swarthout, W. N.

THE following have been inquired for in either the February 10 or February 29, 1924 issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

ARTHUR, D. F., JR.; Akers, Ralph P.; Allan, Albert Victor; Branson, Hosea L. (Billy); Burdick, L. H.; Crews, Herman R.; Davis, Lester; Fulton, Frank; Gistason, Jacob; Goss, Willie; Hagen, August; Hillerby, Robert J.; Holloway, Homer M.; Kubik, Charles J.; Lambert, Edwin; LeRouge, Harry; Lovett, William Norman; Lusk, John; McCoy, W. C.; Mattson, John H., Otterson, Thomas James; Paxton, Christer H.; Sidel, Al.; Sowden, Francis; Spies, Chas. W.; Stassi, John; Wilson, George.

MISCELLANEOUS—E. N. T. G.; Fellow shipmates and gobs who were in barracks 948 East, Company 670, Regiment 9, in Camp Farragut, Great Lakes, Ill., during January, 1919, or in the Gunners Mate School, Barracks C., Company A., Regiment 11, Main Station, Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Ill., during February and March, 1919, or in Unit 17, North U. S. Naval Hospital, Great Lakes, Ill., during April, 1919. I would be pleased to hear from any one in the Zipperien family; J. W. H. Jack; Manlove family.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MARCH 30TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

"BLOOMIN' IDOL MADE O' MUD" ***Sidney Herschel Small***
The "fighting priest" *vs.* official condemnation.

TAKING HOLD ***Raymond S. Spears***
He had nothing but a fliver.

THE KING OF NO MAN'S LAND A Four-Part Story Part II
"He is a white man and an Indian," said *Nuné.* ***Arthur O. Friel***

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SECOND SCRIBE
An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali ***George E. Holt***
A disguise that fooled the sharpest eyes.

BLOOD BROTHERS ***F. St. Mars***
How the fox cubs learned to hunt.

THE WATERED MOLD ***Harry Simon***
The whole world seemed against him.

Still Farther Ahead

IN THE three issues following the next there will be long stories by W. C. Tuttle, Thomson Burtis, Captain Mansfield, Hugh Pendexter, W. Townend, John Webb, William Ashley Anderson, Harold Lamb, Georges Surdez and Arthur D. Howden Smith; and short stories by William Byron Mowery, James K. Waterman, Raymond S. Spears, Magda Leigh, Frank Robertson, Michael J. Phillips, H. C. Bailey, Barry Scobee, Dale Collins, J. H. Greene, Charles Victor Fischer, J. D. Newsom and others—stories of the Old Frontier, the South Seas, the West, the Navy, Labrador, Medieval France, the Mexican Border, the Indian Ocean, the Amazon, Africa, Ancient Asia, the Orkney Islands; of explorers, pioneers, aviators, cow-punchers, mariners, Indians, soldiers, vikings, knights-at-arms, sheep-herders and gobs, adventurers the world around.

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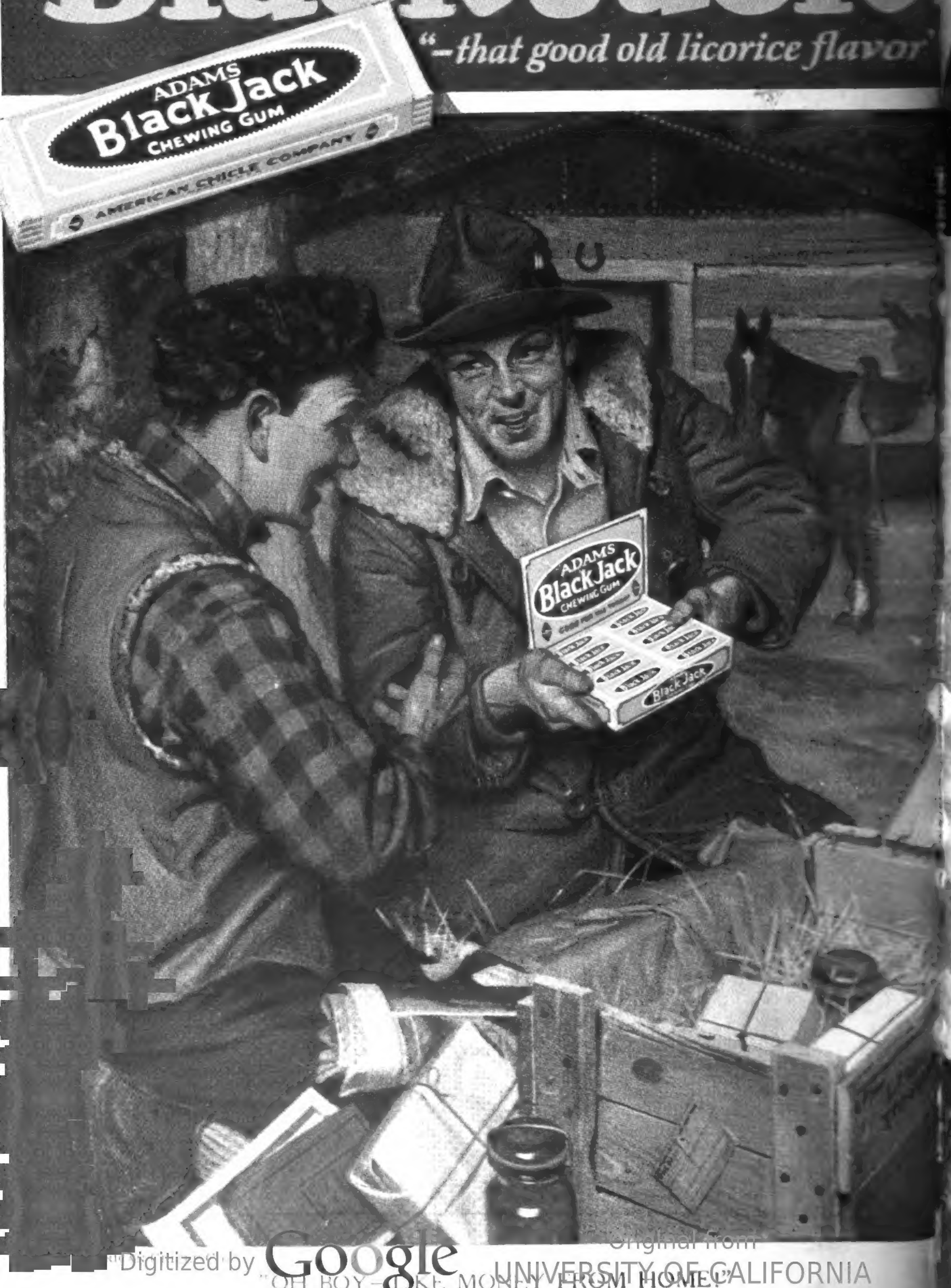
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"OH BOY—LIKE MONEY FROM HOME!"